



THE CONGRESS OF
LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES
COUNCIL OF EUROPE

ACTIVITY REPORT

(December 2013 to mid-April 2014)

Communication by the
Congress Secretary General

at the 1197th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies
on 16 April 2014

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INTRODUCTION

The Congress, 20 years of service to local and regional democracy

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. The anniversary was marked with a special ceremony, during the 26th session, in the presence of former presidents of the Congress and representatives of its institutional partners such as the Committee of the Regions of the European Union.

On this occasion, the 1957 speech of Jacques Chaban Delmas, at the opening of the first European Conference of Local Authorities, the predecessor of the Congress, was broadcast in the hemicycle, providing an opportunity to remember that the question of local and regional democracy, in the Council of Europe began nearly sixty years ago. Since then local and regional elected representatives, leaders and members of the Congress have been the driving force for decentralisation on the continent, by supporting the dialogue between all levels of governance and contributing to develop new forms of citizen participation in decision-making at decentralised levels.

The two annual sessions are the culmination of the work of the Congress. In 2014, they are devoted to the theme "Youth participation: a shared vision for cities and regions". However, the scope of Congress activities is not limited only to its plenary sessions; it unfolds throughout the year, with monitoring, post-monitoring, local and regional election observation, development of co-operation programmes and the contribution to, participation in and organisation of thematic events. Since the last report (December 2013) and the adoption of new procedures in late 2013, the Congress began a post-monitoring dialogue with the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Portugal, among others; conducted a monitoring mission in Belgium; observed the local elections in the Netherlands; contributed to events organised in Graz, Salzburg, Innsbruck and Vienna under the Austrian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers and intensified its dialogue with the Committee of Ministers, including the GR-DEM, and with the national authorities in the member States. It updated its co-operation programmes, including those with Albania and Armenia; and developed its contribution to the Council of Europe action plans for member states.

Of course, there has been much attention in the Congress to the situation in Ukraine, as in other Council of Europe bodies. Following the urgent debate during the 26th session and the adoption of a statement, the Congress declared itself ready to send a delegation to Ukraine, including to the region of the Crimea, to discuss the situation there. The Congress is also committed to actively contributing to the revision of the Council of Europe action plan for Ukraine in terms of its local and regional dimension and is currently preparing an observation mission for the local elections on 25 May.

The report presented here is an overview of the activities carried out since mid-December 2013. It demonstrates the willingness of the Congress to continue to operate in a spirit of innovation and optimisation of its resources. It also illustrates the commitment of its members to the promotion of local and regional democracy on the continent.

Communication by Andreas Kiefer, Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

20 YEARS OF THE CONGRESS

The 26th Session of the Congress, from 25 to 27 March, was in the first place an occasion to celebrate 20 years of this assembly established by the Vienna Summit of Heads of State and Government. A special ceremony was held together with the partners of the Congress – as you know the Committee of the Regions of the European Union is also celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. But the Congress was also reminded that the Council of Europe had already begun to champion local and regional democracy and decentralisation almost 60 years ago. Congress members paid tribute to the French statesman Jacques Chaban-Delmas, the first President of the European Conference of Local Authorities, the predecessor of the Congress, and listened again to his inaugural speech of 1957 which gave a strong political vision of local and regional self-government on our continent.

I would like to especially thank Mme Anne Brasseur, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, whose address and open discussion in the session was much appreciated. The relations between the Congress and the Assembly have been deepening and showing good synergies, for example in election observation but also in several thematic activities.

GENERAL THEME: EMPOWERING YOUTH

In 2013 the Congress chose to address the different aspects of the crisis in Europe as a general theme of its sessions. As young people are especially affected by the crisis, in 2014 “youth” will be in the focus of both Congress sessions and other activities dealing with strategies and policies developed by local and regional authorities as key actors in including young people in society – by providing education, employment and access to other social rights, thus involving them in social and public life and in democracy *starting from the grassroots*.

The March session was dedicated to “Empowering youth: a shared responsibility for cities and regions”. Together with youth representatives, Congress members discussed

- the role and place of young people in building local and regional democracy,
- experiences with and discussions about giving them voting rights at the age of 16, and
- policies to empower Roma youth through participation.

This focus on young people will continue with conferences on youth participation in Strasbourg on 12 June and in Baku on 16 June, the latter in the framework of Azerbaijan’s Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. In October, the Congress will take an unprecedented step of having young people participating together with their national delegations in the session, sitting next to the heads of each national delegation and taking the floor in the debates. A special programme will be envisaged for these young people during the October session, prepared in close co-operation with the Council of Europe’s Youth Department. *I would like mention in particular the quality of this co-operation on youth issues*. Finally, the Congress will contribute concretely to the World Forum for Democracy, which also chose to focus on young people this year.

MONITORING AND POST-MONITORING

The March session was marked by speeches of several ministers and exchanges of views with them – including Austria, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and ministers of different entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I would like to thank the chairmanship and the Ambassadors of these countries for having organised these visits.

These meaningful exchanges of views mark new levels in the continuous development of political dialogue between member states and the Congress over the last years.

In this regard, also a recent exchange of views between the Congress Bureau and the Chair of the GR-DEM, Ambassador Ellen Berends, on the follow-up to Congress recommendations is another welcome step in building closer co-operation with the Committee of Ministers and national

governments in order, for example, to actually implement the activities proposed in Congress recommendations. The Bureau is very grateful that this and the question of recurring issues in monitoring reports on the ECLSG will be on the agenda of a future meeting of the GR-DEM and has nominated Mr. Karl-Heinz Lambertz, Minister-President of the German-Speaking Community of Belgium and Chair of the Governance Committee, to represent the Congress in the dialogue with you.

ELECTION OBSERVATION

The growing number of invitations to observe local or regional elections is yet another sign of the relevance of the Congress' work. The Congress observed local elections in the Netherlands on 19 March and received invitations to observe local elections in Turkey, Georgia and Ukraine.

The Congress Bureau welcomed the Turkish authorities' invitation, received on 20 March, to observe local elections on 30 March, and regretted not having been able to accept it due to the deadlines being too tight for the correct organisation of this observation.

In Ukraine, the Congress will observe the partial municipal elections in 43 cities on 25 May 2014. In Georgia, the Congress will be the only international organisation to observe the local elections in June – a situation which is becoming more and more frequent, when the Congress is acting as the only international observer.

Furthermore, we plan to observe local elections in Azerbaijan in December 2014, and we are grateful for the respective announcement by Mr. Mahmud Mammad-Guliyev, Deputy Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan.

SITUATION IN UKRAINE

The situation of Ukraine attracted special attention during the 26th Session. Following an urgent debate, the Congress adopted a Declaration stating that it does not accept the validity of the referendum in Crimea and therefore defends the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

The day before, the Congress Bureau had reaffirmed its willingness to maintain a dialogue with Russia. It considered, however, that in the current situation, only Congress meetings on the political dialogue for resolving the crisis in the Crimea and the restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine could be held in Russia.

RECOMMENDATION ON TURKEY

The session also adopted a resolution and a recommendation on the situation of local councillors in detention in Turkey. This debate was held following a second visit of the Congress delegation to meet with former Congress member Leyla Güven in a Diyarbakir prison last December. I would like to thank in this regard former Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin for his cooperation in organising this visit.

The Congress stressed that dozens of mayors, deputy mayors and municipal councillors having been in remand detention in Turkey for years should be treated in the same way as all the members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly who were detained in similar circumstances and for the same reasons as Leyla Güven. This was a result of a recent ruling of the Turkish Constitutional Court, and Parliamentarians have recently been freed.

CO-OPERATION ACTIVITIES

The Congress has been developing co-operation programmes for a number of member states. Two such programmes are currently being implemented in Albania and Armenia, and other projects are included in Council of Europe action plans for Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

In the same vein, the Congress has also launched, one year ago, the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion, which offers a framework for dialogue, shared information and best practices at local and regional level. This, however, is an additional task where the Congress still needs funds beyond the ordinary budget to be able to continue this important work.

CHAIRMANSHIPS

I would like to thank the Austrian Chairmanship for its close co-operation with the Congress. The Congress took an active part in a number of events organised in the framework of the Chairmanship – you will find a list in the written activity report.

The Congress is also actively involved in the preparation of Azerbaijan's Chairmanship. Discussions have also been launched on the themes of the Belgian Chairmanship. I would like to thank the ambassadors of these countries for the good co-operation.

REFORM AND WORKING CONDITIONS

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the political relevance of the Congress for this Organisation has increased over the last years, and the Bureau is very grateful for the statements made in this respect by several delegations on the occasion of my previous presentations of the activity reports.

Bureau members and the heads of national delegations as well as the chairs of committees, however, note with concern that the growing potential of the Congress and its concrete delivery unfortunately does not correspond to the resources at its disposal. The Congress continues to operate in the innovative spirit of reform, modernising its working methods.

Despite these efforts, reforms and efficiency gains, the year 2014 shows the significant impact of the cuts and suppressions of posts over the last five years. Congress' current resources remain insufficient to implement to the full its potential in monitoring and election observation, cooperation and thematic activities as well as other missions and tasks entrusted to it by this Committee of Ministers. Voluntary contributions and the implementation of parts of the Council of Europe action plans bring new opportunities. The statutory work, which is the basis for these additional operative activities, however, suffers from the limitations which the Congress Bureau presented to you in the budgetary process last year.

To address these difficulties, the secretariat will continue to rationalise while maintaining the required quality of our work. New calls for secondments and voluntary contributions will be published on the website, in particular for monitoring, co-operation activities and also for new activities not planned in the ordinary budget, as well as the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion. The Congress cannot take on new activities without additional resources and at the expense of its statutory work, which has already been strained by budgetary limitations. The exact job descriptions for these requested secondments will appear online before the summer break.

I first want to convince you of the importance and relevance of these activities for the Council of Europe, and I hope that, once you are convinced, you will respond positively to our appeal.

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1. Latest political developments

a. Agenda

- **A Congress delegation visits Leyla Güven (7 December 2013)**

A delegation of the Congress, comprising the two rapporteurs on Turkey, Anders Knape (Sweden, EPP/CCE) and Leen Verbeek, (Netherlands, SOC), accompanied by Gaye Dođanođlu (Turkey, EPP/CCE), Head of the Turkish delegation to the Congress, carried out a visit to Leyla Güven, former member of the Turkish delegation to the Congress and former Mayor of Viransehir Municipality, in prison in Diyarbakir. Ms Güven has been in prison since December 2009, as have other local politicians, on allegations of abetting, and membership of, a terrorist organisation. The situation of Ms Güven has been addressed in several Congress sessions and, since the Congress first visited her in prison in October 2011, the Congress Bureau has been updated on her situation at each of its meetings. On 26 March, the Congress in session adopted a report on the situation of Leyla Güven and called for Leyla Güven's and all the Turkish local elected representatives' release who find themselves in a similar situation (See under "Session")

- **Communication of the Congress Secretary General to the Committee of Ministers (11 December 2013)**

In his communication, Andreas Kiefer presented an overview of the main activities of the Congress from April to end of November 2013. He underlined that the Congress has continued to develop a monitoring in three stages of the situation of local and regional democracy in member states: monitoring, post-monitoring dialogue and targeted co-operation activities. He recalled that the Congress is actively engaged in political dialogue with governments to encourage the implementation of its recommendations and put a special emphasis on the ratification, during the 25th plenary session in October, of the European Charter of Local Self-Government by the 47th member state, San Marino, which makes the Charter applicable to the whole Council of Europe territory.

- **Declaration by the Bureau on "Regional and minority languages in Europe today" (10 February 2014)**

In this declaration, the Congress Bureau stated that it welcomed the fact that a large majority of the French National Assembly voted, on 28 January 2014, in favour of a constitutional amendment permitting the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by France, 15 years after its signature. It calls on Iceland, Italy and Malta, which have also signed the Charter but not yet ratified it, to follow France's positive example. In addition, it invites the authorities of Albania, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, the Russian Federation and "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" to ratify the Charter which they committed to do when they joined the Council of Europe. The Congress – and in particular its Chamber of Regions – will continue to follow this issue, in close co-operation with the relevant monitoring bodies of the Council of Europe.

- **Meeting of a Congress delegation with the President of the Republic of Cyprus (Nicosia, 19 February 2014)**

On the occasion of the meeting of the Congress Monitoring Committee in Nicosia, a delegation, led by the Monitoring Committee's Chair, Lars O. Molin (Sweden, EPP/CCE), met with the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Nicos Anastasiades. The delegation recalled that the Congress is ready to offer its experience to aid the development of local democracy in Cyprus, in the context of the peace and reconciliation process which was relaunched on 11 February. The Cypriot President reaffirmed his support for the government's approach to decentralisation and for the strengthening of Cypriot municipalities, developed in co-operation with the Council of Europe. The delegation was composed of Jean-Claude Frécon, President of the Congress Chamber of Local Authorities (France, SOC), Andreas Kiefer, Secretary General of the Congress, Irene Louizidou (Cyprus, EPP/CCE) member of

the Congress and Alexis Galanos, Chair of the Association of Cyprus Municipalities. The delegation also met with Constantinos Nicolades, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, and representatives of the Ministry in charge of Local Government, on the decentralisation programme implemented in Cyprus, which is aimed at strengthening the responsibilities and competencies of local authorities.

- **Jury meeting to award Emperor Maximilian Prize (Innsbruck, 27 February 2014)**

The jury composed of representatives the City of Innsbruck and the Land of Tyrol as well as the Congress, the Committee of the Regions, the Assembly of the Regions and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions decided to award the 2014 Emperor Maximilian Prize to Herwig van Staa (Austria, EPP/CCE), President of the Congress, for his outstanding work to promote local and regional democracy, and more specifically transfrontier and inter-regional co-operation, multi-level governance and regional self-government. The ceremony will take place on 8 May 2014. The Emperor Maximilian Prize was created in 1997 by the Province of Tyrol and the City of Innsbruck. It is awarded to personalities or institutions for their achievements in regional and local politics, with special emphasis on the efforts made to implement the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Council of Europe member states. In 2013, it was awarded to Karl-Heinz Lambertz, Minister-President of the Government of the German-Speaking Community of Belgium.

- **Launching of the special edition on the 20 years of the Congress and magazine on “the State of the Congress 2013” (Strasbourg, 25 March 2014)**

The 2013 edition of the annual magazine “The State of the Congress” has been published during the March session. It presents the core activities carried out by the Congress in 2013, notably the monitoring of the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the observation of local and regional elections, as well as targeted co-operation programmes. Topical issues are presented, in particular the impact of the current economic crisis on cities and regions and Roma inclusion at local level. In addition, a special edition dedicated to the 20th Anniversary of the Congress was also made available. It includes an imaginary “posthumous” interview with Jacques Chaban-Delmas, the first President of the Conference of Local Authorities of Europe, the predecessor of the Congress, and the speech he gave on 12 January 1957 at the opening of its first session. All former Presidents of the Congress have also contributed to this magazine by sharing their experience and thoughts on the Congress’s main achievements during their tenure. (See 3.b. Plenary sessions)

b. Ukraine

- **Adoption of a draft declaration by the Monitoring Committee (Nicosia, 19 February 2014)**

At its meeting the Monitoring Committee expressed its grave concern at the escalation of violence in Ukraine. In a draft resolution to be debated during the Congress' March session, the committee gave its full support to an initiative by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to establish an advisory panel to investigate the violent incidents linked to the protests in Kyiv following the country's non-ratification of the association agreement with the European Union. It considered that only genuine and immediate dialogue among all political forces in Ukraine can help the country find a way out of its current profound crisis and calls on all parties to refrain from all forms of violence and to establish conditions conducive to political dialogue on all levels. Such dialogue must engender, without further delay, a constitutional and administrative reform that endows Ukraine with political and administrative institutions which command broad support and which are, as regards local and regional authorities, consistent with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the recommendations adopted by the Congress in October 2013.

- **Visit of the President of the Ukrainian World Congress (Strasbourg, 24 February 2014)**

Future prospects of co-operation between the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Ukrainian World Congress (CKY) were discussed at a meeting between Congress Secretary General, Andreas Kiefer and CKY President, Eugene Czolij. The Ukrainian World Congress is the international body for Ukrainian communities in the diaspora representing over 20 million Ukrainians. It promotes

Ukraine's European integration path and has been involved in, among other projects, substantial non-state funded missions of election observation in Ukraine. Possible areas of collaboration between the Congress and CKY in order to strengthen democracy at the grassroots in Ukraine include activities in view of the next local elections in Ukraine.

- **Declaration of the Congress' President on the proposed referendum in Crimea (16 March 2014)**

Reacting to the announcement of a referendum in the Crimea on 16 March on whether it should join the Russian Federation, Congress President Herwig van Staa declared: "I cannot but deplore this initiative. To hold a referendum, at such short notice, using closed questions, without consultation with the national authorities and in the unauthorized presence of military forces, in flagrant violation of international law, is a travesty of the democratic process and one that I condemn. It would be a serious step backwards for the democratic development of this region. As President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Europe's Pan-European Assembly of elected representatives of Europe's towns and regions, I strongly support the development of greater regional autonomy in our member states. Moreover, in its 2013 Recommendation to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, on Regions and territories with special status in Europe, the Congress urged member states to make greater use of the special status model to address the specific needs of regions with special historical and cultural characteristics, of which the Crimea is a striking example. I would like to point out that the Crimea already enjoys a special status of autonomy within Ukraine. If the people of Crimea wish to further deepen and extend that autonomy, the legal framework exists, within the Republic of Ukraine to revise those constitutional provisions. The Congress would be ready to assist and advise on any such developments."

- **Adoption of a Declaration of the Congress on Ukraine (Strasbourg, 25 March 2014)**

During its March plenary session, the Congress adopted a declaration following an urgent debate on the situation in Ukraine. In the declaration presented by Marc Cools (Belgium, ILDG), the Congress states that it "does not accept the validity of the referendum, held on 16 March last, without the minimum democratic guarantees that should be in place for any vote. This pseudo-consultation should on no account pave the way for a change of borders between Russia and Ukraine." The Congress declared its readiness to send a delegation to the Ukraine, including to the region of Crimea, to examine the situation. It is also at the disposal of the Ukrainian authorities to take part in a mission to observe the local elections to be held on 25 May 2014. The day before, the Congress Bureau had reaffirmed its willingness to maintain a dialogue with Russia to solve the current crisis (See Appendix 2)

- **Exchange of views of the Congress with the PACE President (Strasbourg, 26 March 2014)**

Speaking at the 26th Congress Session, Anne Brasseur, President of the Parliamentary Assembly stated that "the crisis in Ukraine represents a major challenge for Europe and for our Organisation. In the face of this challenge, the three main bodies of the Council of Europe – the Committee of Ministers, the Assembly and the Congress – must speak with one voice" (See 3.b. Plenary sessions)

c. The Chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers

The Austrian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers (November 2013-May 2014)

- **Conference on “Integration policy at local and regional level” (Graz, 4 December 2013)**

The Secretary General of the Congress opened this conference co-organised by the Congress and the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Institute of the Regions of Europe. Andreas Kiefer underlined that “local populations with more than 30% residents having a migration background are becoming increasingly common. These residents have become an important force due to their economic, social and cultural contribution. The true challenge is to find ways of using this diversity for the benefit of the entire community”. Conference participants proposed good practices of cities and regions.

- **Symposium on “Municipalities and Regions as the Foundation of Modern Civil Society” (Salzburg, 7 February 2014)**

The conference, organised jointly by the Congress and the Land of Salzburg, the Austrian Association of Municipalities and the University of Salzburg under the Austrian chairmanship, was opened by the President of the Congress who highlighted the crucial role of municipalities and regions in enhancing citizen participation in democratic processes and fostering civil society. Congress Vice-President, Anders Knappe (Sweden, EPP/CCE), highlighted three areas which are central to involving citizens in the decision-making process: reaching out to citizens where they live, using tools such as poster campaigns, text messages, and specific websites; reinforcing openness and transparency in the democratic processes, and developing a dialogue on complex issues which will lead to joint responses from citizens/elected representatives. Gudrun Mosler-Törnström, Vice-President of the Regional Council of Salzburg and Head of the Austrian Delegation to the Congress, emphasised that in all of Europe, the reaction to significant demographic, social and economic changes is to introduce new forms of participation that could promote activism, foster tolerance and revitalize politics. The event was attended by participants with diverse backgrounds in politics, science, public administration and media.

- **Symposium on 20 years of Congress and the Committee of the Regions (Innsbruck, 27 February 2014)**

The conference, organised jointly by the Congress and the Land of Tyrol, the University of Innsbruck and the Austrian Institute for Federalism, gave participants – academics, experts, representatives of international organisations and civil society – the opportunity to take stock of the situation of decentralisation in Europe. President van Staa stated at the opening that while we have much to celebrate, we cannot ignore that decentralisation, local and regional democracy, has reached a crossroads, challenged by the increasing threats to the European democratic model. He underlined that “Local and regional authorities are at the forefront of responding to these threats and to be successful, we must work to embed a culture of decentralised democracy in European governance. Congress Secretary General, Andreas Kiefer, said that the challenge now is to put into practice the legal framework established over the past two decades, adding that we cannot respond to today’s problems with yesterday’s solutions and with theory alone.

- **Conference on “Investing in our youth: education is key” (Klagenfurt, 31 March 2014)**

The conference, co-organised jointly by the Congress and the Land of Carinthia, was opened by the President of the Congress, with the participation of Barbara Toce (Italy, SOC) and Mara Juzupa (Latvia, ILDG), who presented projects being implemented in their countries: ‘The youth guarantee’ and ‘Say yes to young people’. The aim of the conference was to permit an exchange of good practices regarding education and employment policies, particularly at local level. Mara Juzupa described the initiatives co-coordinated by Latvia’s State Employment Agency in this field, in co-operation with local and regional authorities and with European Union support. Barbara Toce presented the measures taken by the Tuscany region to help young people enter the labour market.

2. Co-operation within the Council of Europe

a. The intergovernmental sector

i. Committee of Ministers

In the framework of the political dialogue with the Committee of Ministers, the President of the Congress and its Secretary General hold several annual exchanges of views with the Deputies and participates in ministerial sessions.

In his communication on 11 December 2013, Andreas Kiefer presented the Congress activities since April 2013, which included, among others, the thematic debates of the 26th session, several monitoring visits to member states, local election observation missions as well as thematic activities and co-operation programmes.

The Congress is represented in the Committee of Ministers' Rapporteur groups, such as the GR-DEM, the GR-EXT, the GR-H and the GR-SOC by its Secretary General or Secretariat.

It is represented in other Steering Committees and Committees 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), the Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues (CAHROM) and the Group of Specialists on child-friendly justice (CJ-S-CH) – through its thematic rapporteurs or its Secretariat.

ii. Action Plans

In close coordination with the centre of expertise on the reform of local democracy of Council of Europe, the Congress is contributing to projects on local and regional democracy in the Council of Europe action plans for Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine as well as in proposals of activities in Belarus and Kosovo.*

It is also contributing to the Council of Europe policy towards neighbouring regions and has established relations with Morocco and Tunisia. (See 6. Co-operation programmes)

iii. Secretariat of the European Charter of Regional and Minority languages

In Paris, on 10 December, the Congress organised, together with the Secretariat of the Charter, a seminar on "Regional and minority languages in Europe today". (See 5.e. Thematic activities)

This seminar was a good example of the synergies and co-ordination which are developed by the Congress with the Council of Europe intergovernmental Sector.

b. The Parliamentary Assembly

The Congress has regular exchanges with the Parliamentary Assembly in areas of common interest in order to develop synergies and increase co-operation with the respective Secretariats and rapporteurs, notably in the area of monitoring and the implementation of the ONE in FIVE campaign.

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

The Congress President and Anne Brasseur, Parliamentary Assembly President, held a bilateral meeting during the 26th session of the Congress. They discussed the situation in Ukraine and reaffirmed their willingness to enhance institutional co-operation between the two bodies, especially in the field of monitoring. Mrs Brasseur has also had an exchange of views with the Congress members during the session. (See C. Activities of the Congress bodies)

c. The Commissioner for Human Rights

The Commissioner for Human Rights follows the work of the Congress on the implementation of human rights at the local level and awareness-raising of local and regional authorities in this regard.

Commissioner Nils Muižnieks contributed to the third report of the Monitoring Committee on best practices in implementing human rights at local and regional level in Council of Europe member States and other continents, by communicating an opinion on the draft report. The report was adopted during the 26th session, during a debate with the participation of the Commissioner. In his presentation on 25 March, Mr Muižnieks stressed that shared human rights duties between the authorities at national, regional and local level necessitate close co-operation and co-ordination. He underlined that local and regional authorities can ensure that residents' human rights are not only respected but also fulfilled.

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

The Congress has a close and deep co-operation with the Venice Commission, particularly in the fields of election observation and the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, as well as in the programmes of co-operation with neighbouring regions.

Co-operation between the Venice Commission, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress in electoral matters mainly occurs by means of the Council for Democratic Elections (CDE). The principles found in the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, produced by the CDE, are taken into account in Congress reports and recommendations on electoral matters. Lars O. Molin (Sweden, EPP/CCE) and Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, SOC) are the Congress institutional representatives to the CDE.

The Congress has also strengthened its co-operation with the Venice Commission on issues of local and regional democracy. Its opinions are also taken into account by Congress rapporteurs during their visits and in recommendations adopted by the Congress. Furthermore, Lars O. Molin, Chair of the Monitoring Committee, regularly represents the Congress at meetings of the Venice Commission.

The institutional co-operation activities with Morocco and Tunisia are conducted in close collaboration with the Venice Commission. (See 6.b. Co-operation activities and external relations)

e. The Special Representative of the Secretary General 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 to establish a co-operation framework for cities and regions willing to promote inclusive policies for Roma, the European Alliance for Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion. At the end of 2013, the Congress and the special Representative launched the ROMACT project with the financial support of the European Commission. (See under section 5. Thematic activities)

3. Activities of the Congress bodies

a. Bureau

- **Strasbourg, 10 February 2014**

At their first meeting of the year, members of the Congress Bureau held an exchange of views with Ambassador Ellen Berends, Chair of the Committee of Ministers' Group of Rapporteurs on Democracy (GR-DEM). The Bureau decided to accept the invitation extended by Ambassador Berends to present the report on recurring issues in the field of monitoring of the Charter of local self-government and election observation to the GR-DEM; and to annually renew its invitation to the Chair of the GR-DEM to meet the Bureau, in order to continue to strengthen dialogue with the Committee of Ministers; and to receive regular information from the Congress Secretary General on the debates being held within the GR-DEM.

They also discussed the situation of Leyla Güven following a visit to her in detention by the Congress' two rapporteurs Anders Knape, (Sweden, EPP/CCE) and Leen Verbeek, (Netherlands, SOC). Members focused on local and regional democracy in, amongst other countries, Ukraine and Georgia and examined the situation of minority languages in Europe. Other items on the agenda included the 26th session, the activities of Congress committees, the observation of local and regional elections, the neighbourhood policy, revision of the Congress' Charter and Rules of Procedure and an update on the Congress' work on co-operation activities and Roma issues.

- **Strasbourg, 25 and 27 March 2014**

The Bureau held a debate and approved a draft declaration on the situation in Ukraine. It decided to add to the agenda of the session, on 25 March, an urgent debate on Ukraine and to submit the Bureau's draft Declaration to the Congress members' vote. Considering the positions of the Council of Europe bodies (Committee of Ministers, PACE, Venice Commission) it decided to only hold meetings in Russia which are dedicated to the search for a political solution and therefore decided that the meetings of the Monitoring Committee and the Current Affairs Committee, initially planned in Ulianovsk and in Kazan (Russian Federation) respectively, should be held in another country. It also examined a text from Vice-President, Svetlana Orlova (Russian Federation, EPP/CCE), presenting the view of the Russian delegation and took note of the request by the President of the Chamber of Regions, Nataliya Romanova (Ukraine, ILDG), concerning the sending of a Congress information mission to Ukraine, including to Crimea, to investigate how the Congress' recommendations are implemented. Mrs Romanova also proposed that the Congress should observe the local elections on 25 May 2014 in Ukraine, and the bureau agreed, subject to the receipt of a formal invitation.

Furthermore, the Bureau took note of the information given by the President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, Jean-Claude Frécon (France, SOC), that a seminar on the European Charter of Local Self-Government might be held in Belarus in the second half of 2014. It welcomed the Turkish authorities' invitation to observe the local elections of 30 March 2014 and regretted not having been able to accept it due to the deadlines being too tight for the correct organisation of this observation. It took note of the co-operation activities of the Congress and of the Council of Europe in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, as well as in Belarus, Kosovo*, Morocco and Tunisia, of the latest activities of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion and approved the theme of the 2014 edition of the European Local Democracy Week which will be: "Participatory democracy: sharing, proposing, deciding".

b. Plenary sessions

- **26th Session (Strasbourg, 25-27 March 2014)**

The Congress has decided to devote its two annual sessions in 2014 (March and October) to the theme “Empowering youth: a shared responsibility for cities and regions”. The aim is to generate exchanges between European local and regional elected representatives on the participation of young people, as actors of local and regional democracy. This gave rise to a number of targeted debates on issues relating to youth and democracy during the 26th Congress session, from 25 to 27 March 2014 : “Is there a real place for young people in local and regional democracy?”, “Fostering youth employment through education and training: role and best practices within regions in Europe”, “Implementation of human rights policies at regional level”, “Empowering Roma youth participation: effective policy design at local and regional levels” and “Youth participation – Voting at 16?”.

A report on best practices in implementing human rights at local and regional level was adopted. In its resolution, the Congress proposes the organisation of a human rights forum, with the participation of elected local and regional representatives, to facilitate the exchange of experiences. It also invites its Monitoring Committee to pursue its activities aimed at raising awareness in the human rights field, particularly on its monitoring visits to Council of Europe member States

Other debates included local and regional democracy in Armenia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Sweden, and the results of post-monitoring dialogue in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Furthermore, a ceremony took place on 25 March to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Congress in 1994, following the Summit of Heads of States and Governments in Vienna in 1993. The speech of Jacques Chaban-Delmas, the first President of the Conference of Local Authorities of Europe, the predecessor of the Congress, which he gave on 12 January 1957 at the opening of its first session, was broadcast in the hemicycle on this occasion. Most of former Presidents of the Congress since 1994 attended the ceremony, as well as representatives of major Congress institutional partners, the Committee of the Regions, the Assembly of the Regions (AER) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

On 25 March, the session held an urgent debate on the situation in Ukraine and Crimea and adopted a declaration presented by Marc Cools (Belgium, ILDG). It states that the Congress “does not accept the validity of the referendum, held on 16 March last, without the minimum democratic guarantees that should be in place for any vote. This pseudo-consultation should on no account pave the way for a change of borders between Russia and Ukraine. The Congress therefore condemns Russia’s annexation of Crimea and Sebastopol in violation of international law.” Moreover, the Congress declared its readiness to send a delegation to the Ukraine, including to the region of Crimea, to examine the situation. It is also at the disposal of the Ukrainian authorities to take part in a mission to observe the local elections to be held on 25 May 2014.

The Congress adopted a report on the situation of Leyla Güven and other local elected representatives held in detention in Turkey. The rapporteurs, Anders Knape, (Sweden, EPP/CCE) and Leen Verbeek, (Netherlands, SOC), pointed out that 15 mayors, 23 deputy mayors and dozens of municipal councillors had been in remand detention for years – an unprecedented situation in Council of Europe member States. It invited the Turkish authorities to release Leyla Güven and all the Turkish local elected representatives who find themselves in a similar situation.

It also adopted a strategy to promote the right of local authorities to be consulted by the other levels of government. The strategy was presented by the thematic rapporteur of the Congress, Anders Knape (Sweden, EPP/CCE) and is based on several activities, namely the preparation of guidelines for national associations of local and regional authorities, the extension of the application of the relevant articles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government to all member states, an evaluation of national consultation processes and the collection of data from member states at the end of 2015 with a view to preparing a report in 2016.

Andrä Rupprechter, Austrian Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water, representing the Austrian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, said “It is imperative that all levels of government are vigilant and reactive where need be. This is particularly important when the social fabric of our countries is under pressure, not least as a consequence of economic difficulties. Local and regional authorities have a crucial role in this respect,” He added that the Committee of Ministers attaches special importance to the quality of democracy and governance at the grassroots level, as well as to the implementation of human rights policies including at local and regional level.

Anne Brasseur, President of the Parliamentary Assembly, said that “The crisis in Ukraine represents a major challenge for Europe and for our Organisation. In the face of this challenge, the three main bodies of the Council of Europe – the Committee of Ministers, the Assembly and the Congress – must speak with one voice.” She firmly condemned the referendum held in Crimea in violation of Ukraine’s constitution, and the annexation of this territory by the Russian Federation. Moving on to talk about the place of young people in society, Ms Brasseur stressed the need to set up mechanisms which enable young people to contribute actively to the day-to-day life of the towns and municipalities they live in. She concluded by welcoming the good co-operation between the Congress and the Parliamentary Assembly.

Council of Europe Secretary General, Thorbjørn Jagland, stated that the crisis in Ukraine was one of the worst crises in Europe since the Second World War, as it threatened the very cohesion of what is called pan-Europe. He said that “the future of Ukraine depends on our ability to consolidate democracy. It is the weakening of the rule of law and human rights that has led to the crisis in Ukraine. Protecting these two pillars must be a fundamental aspect of security in Europe,” he also underlined the role that local and regional authorities must play by involving citizens, and particularly young people, in the ownership of democracy.

Other prominent speakers invited to the 26th session included: Ronald Plasterk, Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Netherlands; Zoran Mikulić, Minister of Justice, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Lejla Rešić, Minister of Administration and Local Self-government of the Republika Srpska; Hande Ozsan Bozatlı, President of the Assembly of European Regions (AER); Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and Maryna Stavnyichuk, Advisor to the President of Ukraine.

c. The Chambers

- **The Chamber of Local Authorities**

The Chamber began its session by examining a report on local democracy in Armenia. (See “Monitoring”). The Chamber then held a debate on “Being a councillor today” with contributions from René Dosière, a member of the French parliament, Michaël Salomo, Mayor of Haßmersheim, Germany’s youngest mayor, and Marcel Boogers, Professor of innovation and regional governance at the University of Twente in the Netherlands. The participants discussed the changing role of local elected representatives, faced with a decline in trust in the political class and the challenge of involving young people in local politics. It was agreed that local councillors need to adapt to the complexity of multi-level governance and the changing circumstances of local politics and local governance in order to continue to shape the policy making process.

A second debate was held on the issue digital media and urban mobilisation, with the participation of Kerem Öktem, a fellow of the University of Sabanci in Istanbul, Kristina Bedinskikh, a blogger from the Maidan independence movement in Kyiv and Jan Hanrath, a political analyst and researcher at the Institute for Development and Peace at the University of Duisburg, Germany. The debate focused on how the nature of protest politics is changing, facilitated by digital media, enabling rapid mobilisation and presenting serious challenges to central governments. While it remained to be seen how protest politics could be harnessed to increase the quality of democracy, they were creating strategic moments in the political development of the countries concerned, with populations forcefully expressing a need for a stronger and more open democracy.

- **The Chamber of Regions**

During the March Session, the Chamber held two important thematic debates: a debate on youth employment through education and training and a debate on implementing human rights policies at regional level. Both debates presented several best practices within regions in Europe and their conclusions may contribute to the Chamber's future work.

The Chamber followed the political developments at the regional level in Europe, in particular regional elections and territorial autonomy in the Council of Europe member states (Catalonia, Scotland, the Basque Country, South Tyrol, Greenland, Gaugazia, Voivodina, Sardinia).

During the 26th session of the Chamber, the Chair, Nataliya Romanova (Ukraine, ILDG) reported on the activities of the Chamber. The session was centred on three major items: the implementation of the co-operation agreement between the Congress and the Assembly of the European Regions (AER); the debate on fostering youth employment through education and training: role and best practices within regions in Europe and the debate on implementing human rights policies at regional level. Wutrich-Pelloli, Member of the Political Bureau of the AER, presented the action plan that implements the co-operation agreement between the Congress and the Assembly of European Regions. (See 6.a. Co-operation activities and External relations)

For the debate on fostering youth employment through education and training, the guest speakers presented good examples of how regions can counteract youth unemployment. The youngest members of the Chamber actively took part in the debate. Mr Luciano Vecchi, Member of the Emilia Romagna Regional Parliament (Italy), concluded the debate, stressing in particular the necessity to "listen to young generations and involve them in any decision concerning their future and the future of Europe."

Leen Verbeek (Netherlands, SOC), Queen's Commissioner of the Province of Flevoland, drew the conclusions of the debate on implementing human rights policies at regional level. He stressed the important role that regions – given their competencies in many member states – can play in this regard. The Chamber of Regions is developing its awareness-raising actions in this area.

d. The Committees

- **The Monitoring Committee**

The Monitoring Committee met on 16 February 2014 in Nicosia (Cyprus). At this meeting the Committee approved the draft recommendations on local and regional democracy in Sweden, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Armenia. It approved a draft resolution and recommendation on post-monitoring of local and regional democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and best practices in Council of Europe member states on the implementation of human rights at local and regional levels. The committee also held a debate and adopted a draft resolution on the situation in Ukraine. Finally, the situation of local and regional democracy in Georgia was also discussed after listening to Tengiz Shergelashvili, the first Georgian Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure, present the newly adopted law and ongoing reform on local self-government, and hearing from the former mayor of Tbilisi and current president of the Georgian delegation to the Congress, George Ugulava, who also gave an update on the situation, including his dismissal from the office of mayor of Tbilisi.

The committee also met on 25 March 2014, during the session of Congress and the discussions focused mainly on the situation in the Ukraine, and the observation of local and regional elections.

- **The Governance Committee**

At its meeting in Strasbourg on 25 March 2014, the Governance Committee approved a preliminary draft report, resolution and recommendation on inter-regional co-operation. These texts will be submitted to the Congress for adoption during the 27th plenary session in October 2014.

The Committee was updated on the on-going work on the conditions of office of local elected representatives and the trends in regionalisation in member states. It was agreed that future reports should be prepared on new forms of local governance and metropolitan regions.

The Chair informed the Committee about the up-coming first meeting of the newly formed intergovernmental committee on democracy and governance (CDDG) as well as the work of the Parliamentary Assembly on internet and politics.

On the 27 March, the Committee held a seminar on 'deepening democracy with e-media' which was structured around three debates on 'open data for transparency in local government', 'web applications for voters' and 'combining on-line and off-line local democracy.' The discussions of the seminar will be the basis for a future report on e-democracy.

- **The Current Affairs Committee**

The Current Affairs Committee organised three country visits of the Congress Thematic Spokesperson on Children, Johan van den Hout (Netherlands, SOC). He visited the United Kingdom in December 2013, Belgium in January 2014 and Austria in April 2014. The objective of these visits was to promote the Congress pact of towns and regions to stop sexual violence against children, which is part of the Congress contribution to the Council of Europe's One in Five campaign. As a result, a number of cities have shown their commitment to joining the pact and raising the issue of adhering to the pact in their municipal councils, while the Deputy Mayor of Liverpool signed the pact on the spot during the visit. Further such visits are planned to the Czech Republic and to Germany in September-October. Currently 32 towns, regions and organisations have already signed the pact, which has been translated into 22 languages.

The Committee held its regular meeting in Strasbourg on 25 March 2014, during the 26th Session of the Congress. The Committee discussed the progress in preparing its reports on changing perceptions of cultural diversity through intercultural education and communication strategies; on promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities and their participation at local and regional levels; on fostering partnerships with civil society and on the situation of regional media. The Committee was also informed of the preparation of the conference on youth participation, to be held in Strasbourg on 12 June 2014, following the Committee meeting on 11 June.

Committee members took an active part in a number of events organised in Austria in the framework of the Austrian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, including the Symposium on "Municipalities and Regions as the Foundation of Modern Civil Society" (Salzburg, 7 February), the conference on "Investing in our youth: education is key" (Klagenfurt, 31 March-1 April) and the International Symposium on Human Rights and Disability (Vienna, 10-11 April).

4. Monitoring local and regional democracy

a. The monitoring activities

i. Visits carried out

- **Belgium (4-6 February 2014)**

In the second part of the monitoring visit to Belgium, Congress Rapporteurs, Henrik Hammar (Sweden, EPP/CCE) and Urs Wüthrich-Pelloli (Switzerland, SOC) looked at the action taken by Belgium to honour its commitments arising from the ratification of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 2004 and the follow-up given to the 6th State Reform, adopted in December 2013 by the two chambers of the Belgian parliament. The first part of the monitoring visit had taken place on 8 and 9 October 2013. Meetings were notably scheduled with Kris Peeters and Geert Bourgeois, respectively Minister-President and Deputy Minister-President of the Flemish government, as well as with Koen Geens, the Finance Minister; representatives of the Walloon government and the ombudsmen of the communities and municipalities; with Roger Stevens, the First President of the State Council; Karl-Heinz Lambertz, Minister-President of the German-speaking Community and Alexander Miesen, Speaker of the German-speaking Parliament

ii. Adopted recommendations and reports

- **United Kingdom**

The Congress adopted Recommendation 353 (2014) on the situation of local and regional democracy in the United Kingdom at its 26th session. The Congress rapporteurs, Angelika Kordfelder (Germany SOC) and Alexander Uss (Russian Federation, EPP/CCE) expressed satisfaction that, on the whole, the situation of local and regional democracy in the United Kingdom fulfilled the commitments entered into by that country under the European Charter of Local Self-Government. However, they regretted that local self-government was not constitutionally or legislatively enshrined in the United Kingdom and noted that local and regional authorities did not have adequate financial resources. The Congress recommends that the United Kingdom authorities develop more institutionalised consultation arrangements for local government and take steps to reduce the financial constraints on local authorities resulting from cuts and indebtedness. Furthermore, it encourages the United Kingdom authorities to review their declaration on the scope of the Charter in order to include the Greater London Authority and Northern Ireland.

- **The Netherlands**

The Congress adopted Recommendation 352 (2014) on the situation of local and regional democracy in the Netherlands, following a monitoring visit to the country from 14 to 16 May 2013 by Congress rapporteurs, Artur Torres Pereira (Portugal, EPP/CCE) and Jean-Pierre Liouville (France, SOC). In the text adopted on 26 March, which made a positive assessment on the whole, the Congress recommends that the Netherlands authorities define the principle of local and regional self-government in domestic legislation (and, insofar as possible, in the Constitution), reinforce the “autonomous” and “proper” competences of municipalities and provinces, and strengthen the mechanism of consultation between central government and the municipal and provincial authorities. The Netherlands authorities are also invited to amend the law on municipal and provincial finances and improve local taxation to guarantee local authorities greater autonomy.

- **Armenia**

The Congress adopted Recommendation 351 (2014) on local democracy in Armenia on 26 March. While the Congress rapporteur, Nigel Mermagen (United Kingdom, ILDG) welcomed the efforts made by the Armenian authorities to implement the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, in particular by introducing constitutional changes in 2005 and adopting new legislation in 2008, he emphasised that “Armenian local authorities only have a limited role”. “In practice, Armenian local authorities do not always have full and exclusive powers, with local government bodies serving more as agents for the central government than as autonomous actors of local public

administration,” he explained. The Congress therefore recommends that the Armenian authorities review the legislation in order to better implement the principle of subsidiarity and allow the local authorities to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs. The Congress also calls on the Armenian authorities to increase local authorities’ own resources.

- **Sweden**

The Congress adopted Recommendation 357 (2014) on the situation of local and regional democracy in Sweden, following a monitoring visit to the country by the co-rapporteurs Luzette Wagenaar-Kroon (Netherlands, EPP/CCE) and Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, SOC) in September 2013. The rapporteurs emphasised the high quality of Swedish local democracy, which comply, on the whole, with the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. In particular, they welcomed the recent incorporation of the principle of proportionality in the Swedish Constitution, intended to ensure that restrictions on local self-government do not exceed what is necessary, and the granting of regional development competences to numerous county councils. They recommended the Swedish authorities to take measures to strengthen the principle of subsidiarity, to set up a formal consultation procedure to allow local authorities and their representative association to make an input into all decisions taken at State level that concern them and to consider the local authorities’ demand for indexation of state grants and linking them to demographic changes.

iii. Post-monitoring activities

The aim of post-monitoring activity is to develop a political dialogue with the authorities of the country concerned and to agree on a roadmap for the implementation of the Congress recommendations.

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina (10 and 11 December 2013)**

Congress Rapporteurs, Beat Hirs (Switzerland, ILDG) and Jean-Marie Belliard (France, EPP/CCE) examined the follow-up given to Recommendation 324 (2012) on local and regional democracy in this country. The rapporteurs reaffirmed the readiness of the Congress to assist the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina in their declared intention to strengthen local democracy. The Congress adopted a Recommendation 356 (2014) and a Resolution 369 (2014) on post monitoring in this country. The recommendation, pointing to the long-standing political and institutional deadlock at state and federation levels, invites the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina notably to guarantee the fundamental functions of local self-government, allocating sufficient financial resources to local authorities and revising the financial equalisation mechanism. Finally, the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina are urged to draw on the expertise of the Congress for any reform programmes which would strengthen devolution, in co-operation, with local stakeholders.

- **Portugal (4 March 2014)**

Congress Rapporteur, Jos Wiene (Netherlands, EPP/CCE) examined the follow-up to the Recommendation 323 (2012) on local and regional democracy in this country. A first post-monitoring visit had been carried out on 6 September 2013. Meetings took place with the Portuguese Secretary of State for Local Administration, Antonio Leitão Amaro, the Secretary of State for Budget, Hélder Reis, as well as with representatives of the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities (ANMP) and the National Association of Parishes (ANAFRE) A third meeting is scheduled to take place in autumn 2014 with the participation of all relevant stakeholders in the field of local and regional democracy in Portugal.

b. The observation of local and regional elections

- **The Netherlands (17- 20 March 2014)**

Further to the invitation by the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, a delegation of the Congress carried out a mission to observe the municipal elections of 19 March 2014 in the Netherlands. The Congress observation delegation, headed by Pearl Pedergrana, (Switzerland, SOC), was composed of 12 Congress members from 13 European countries. It held preparatory meetings with the Dutch Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Ronald Plasterk; representatives of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG); members of the Dutch delegation to the Congress and representatives of the Dutch Electoral Council (“Kiesraad”) in the Hague. In Amsterdam, a meeting with party representatives and municipal candidates was organised. On election day, six deployment teams observed the municipal elections in different districts and provinces of the country. Presenting the first conclusions on 20 March, the Head of delegation underlined the openness, transparency and inclusiveness of the election process. The Congress delegation also raised a few points to be addressed by the Dutch authorities, in particular regarding the counting of the votes. The Congress delegation, noting the high number of competing parties, invited the Netherlands to consider other regulations for the creation of parties and the introduction of thresholds. It also invited the Dutch authorities to consider the introduction of early voting by mail as well as advancing further on tools to vote via the Internet. Finally, the rapporteur regretted the absence of regulations concerning limitations of expenditure and sponsoring of party and campaign financing.

5. Thematic activities

a. Human rights at local level

- **Conference on "Human rights at local and regional level" (Graz, 3 December 2013)**

At the opening of this conference, organised by the University of Graz and the European Training and Research Centre, the Congress Secretary General stated that “human rights are concrete, so is their realisation, which takes place not in an abstract legal space but in a concrete environment where people live, work and interact – in the environment of our communities, of our towns, cities and regions.” Andreas Kiefer underlined, in particular, the importance of training of politicians and civil servants, awareness-raising, benchmarking and setting up independent complaints’ mechanisms accessible at local level.

b. Social inclusion

The European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion

- **Accession of Paris to the European Alliance of cities and regions for Roma inclusion (18 December 2013)**

Jean -Claude Frécon (France, SOC), Vice-President of the Congress attended the ceremony marking the accession of Paris to the Alliance in the presence of Pierre Schapira and Claudine Bouygues, Deputy Mayors of Paris. The Alliance was created following the recognition, at national and European level, that Roma integration is primarily an issue for local and regional authorities. The Alliance brings together cities and regions which are prepared to make a commitment to running local programmes for Roma inclusion and it implements a joint Council of Europe/European Commission (ROMACT) project which aims to develop an integrated approach in this area combining housing, employment, education and health policies.

- **Roma inclusion : launching Conference of ROMACT and ROMED2 in Italy (Milan, 18 January 2014)**

The ROMACT and the ROMED 2 programmes were officially launched in Italy during a conference in Milan opened by the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Minister of Integration, the Vice-Minister of Labour and Social Policies and John Warmisham (United Kingdom, SOC), Vice-President of the Congress. Mayors and representatives of several Italian pilot cities notably Bari, Milan, Napoli, Pavia, Rome and Torino also took part. ROMACT is a joint initiative of the Council of Europe and the European Commission which implements, with the support of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion, the objective to enhancing political will and building the capacity of local and regional authorities in drafting and implementing plans and projects for Roma inclusion. ROMED2 is focusing on improving democratic governance and participation of the Roma community through mediation. ROMACT is at present being implemented in Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Italy jointly with the ROMED2

- **National workshop of the European Alliance of cities and regions (Paris, 13 February 2014)**

The first workshop of French local authorities participating in the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma gave the opportunity to inform participants of the activities of the Alliance since it was launched in March 2013 and discuss its future action plan to be implemented in coordination with the ROMED2 and ROMACT programmes. They will also identify the needs and expectations of the participating local authorities, and will discuss their practices with regard to projects promoting Roma inclusion with a view to develop the exchange of know-how and experience. A meeting with French NGOs active on Roma issues will also take place. The French local authorities participating in the Alliance are so far: Aubervilliers, the Department of Val de Marne, Lille, Lyon, Paris and Strasbourg.

b. Citizen participation:

- **Seminar on “Deepening democracy with e-media” (27 March 2014)**

The Seminar, opened by Karl-Heinz Lambertz (Belgium, SOC), Chair of the Congress Governance Committee, and by Leo Aadel (Estonia, ILDG) and Annemieke Traag (Netherlands, ILDG), co-rapporteurs of the Congress on e-democracy, was structured around three debates on “Open Data for transparency in local government”, “Web applications for voters” and “Combining on-line and off-line local democracy.” The seminar provided the opportunity to discuss the experience of Cambridge City Council (United Kingdom) on the use of open-data, the development of a web application “Election Compass” in the Netherlands and the combination of e-democracy with traditional methods of democracy in Estonia. The discussions of the seminar will be the basis for the preparation of a report on e-democracy prepared by the Governance Committee of Congress.

- **Adoption of the slogan of the 2014 edition of the European Local Democracy Week (Strasbourg, 24 March 2014)**

On 24 March 2014, the Bureau of the Congress decided to dedicate the 2014 edition of the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) to participatory democracy and adopted a new slogan : “Participatory democracy: sharing, proposing, deciding.” A special emphasis will be given to youth participation, which will also give the opportunity to establish a link between the ELDW and the World Forum for Democracy (3-5 November 2014) which will focus on youth. Gaye Doğanoğlu (Turkey, EPP/CCE), political coordinator of the ELDW also presented the conclusions of the general ELDW coordination meeting, held in Paris on 14 February 2014, to the Bureau.

c. Children's Rights

- **Promoting the Pact of Towns and Regions to Stop Sexual Violence against Children in the United Kingdom (4-6 December 2013)**

During his visit to the United Kingdom, Johan van den Hout (Netherlands, SOC), Congress Thematic Spokesperson on Children, met around 20 mayors, councillors and local authority representatives in London, Birmingham, Sandwell, Nottingham, Derby, Manchester, Salford, Liverpool and Cardiff to raise their awareness of the proposals made in the Pact and encourage them to implement them in their own authorities so as to prevent abuse, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators, while ensuring full participation for children. The Deputy Mayor of Liverpool signed the pact on 6 December 2013. The pact is a Congress contribution to the Council of Europe ONE in FIVE campaign designed to promote the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Convention) in the 47 member countries.

- **Conference on the implementation of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2012-2015 (Dubrovnik, 27 March 2014)**

Johan van den Hout (Netherlands, SOC), thematic spokesperson on children, presented the Congress' contribution to the "ONE in FIVE" campaign at this conference. He gave examples of good practices at the grassroots level and highlighted activities to promote the Congress pact of towns and regions to stop sexual violence against children. He underlined that the pact translates the Lanzarote Convention into a list of local and regional policies and practical initiatives for developing child-friendly services, protecting children and helping to prevent sexual violence within the community.

d. Youth

- **Empowering youth: a shared responsibility for cities and regions**

The Congress has decided to devote a large part of its two annual sessions in 2014 (March and October) to the theme "Empowering youth: a shared responsibility for cities and regions". The aim is to generate exchanges between European local and regional elected representatives on the participation of young people, as actors of local and regional democracy. This gave rise to a number of targeted debates on issues relating to youth and democracy during the 26th Congress session, from 25 to 27 March 2014. (See 3.b. Plenary sessions)

- **Conference on "Investing in our youth: education is key" (Klagenfurt, 31 March 2014)**

The conference, co-organised by the Congress and the Land of Carinthia, was opened by the President of the Congress, with the participation of Barbara Toce (Italy, SOC) and Mara Juzupa (Latvia, ILDG), who presented projects being implemented in their countries. (See 1.c. Austrian Chairmanship)

e. Regional and minority languages

- **Seminar on "Regional and minority languages in Europe today" (Paris, 9-10 December 2013)**

The Seminar was organised in the French Senate in co-operation with the Secretariat of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe. It was the occasion to take stock of the situation of regional languages from the viewpoints of the European Union and the Council of Europe following the report on the subject adopted by the European Parliament in September 2013. Special attention was also paid to the role of local and regional authorities in protecting and promoting regional or minority languages. As a follow-up, the Bureau of the Congress adopted on 10 February 2014 a declaration confirming the importance it attaches to this issue. (See 1.a. Agenda)

6. Co-operation activities and External Relations

a. External partnerships

i. The Committee of the Regions of the European Union

In Paris on 9 December 2013, the Congress organised a meeting of the “Contact Group Congress/Committee of the Regions (CoR)”. It presented its action on local and regional democracy, in particular within non-EU member states, and its activities on devolution, regionalisation and multi-level governance. It proposed joint initiatives with the CoR for 2014 and decided to hold a joint meeting between the CIVEX Commission of the CoR and the Governance Committee of the Congress to take place on 17 November 2014 in Brussels. It was also agreed that the President of the Committee of the Regions will address the Congress Session in October 2014.

On 7 March 2014, the President of the Chamber of Regions, Nataliya Romanova (Ukraine, ILDG), took part, together with the President of the Congress, in the Committee of the Regions Summit of Regions and Cities in Athens. The summit adopted a final declaration that stressed the need for national reform programmes and long-term investments and the need to ensure better spending and better administrative capacity of local and regional authorities.

On 3 April 2014, she took part in the 106th plenary session of the Committee of the Regions in Brussels, together with the President of the Congress. At the opening, President Van Staa welcomed and supported “The Charter for Multilevel Governance” which was adopted by the Committee of the Regions.

ii. European Associations of local and regional authorities

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

Herwig van Staa, Congress President, and Andreas Kiefer, Secretary General, met with Pilar Rojo Noguera and Xosé Sarmiento Méndez, respectively President and Secretary General of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE) in Athens on 7 March 2014. In the context of the co-operation agreement between the two institutions, they discussed common priorities, notably “digital inclusion” and citizen participation at regional level. They specifically focused on the use of new technologies to facilitate the involvement of citizens in the work of regional parliaments and how these parliaments respond to popular initiatives. Herwig Van Staa invited regions with legislative powers to make full use of the opportunities offered by the Congress to exchange good practices beyond the borders of the European Union.

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

During its 26th Session, the Congress signed a co-operation agreement with the Assembly of European Regions, as well as an action plan for 2014-2015. Three priority areas of action are identified in the agreement: the decentralisation and the promotion of regional autonomy, youth participation in political life and the promotion of regional or minority languages. A discussion on the implementation of this agreement took place on 26 March in the Chamber of Regions.

b Co-operation programmes and action plans

The Congress has continued to develop its co-operation activities in a number of countries and has submitted projects for co-financing to potential donors.

iii. Member States of the Council of Europe

- **Albania**

Within the framework of the project entitled “Strengthening local government structures and co-operation of local elected representatives”, run by the Council of Europe, the Congress is leading the setting-up of a unified platform for dialogue and co-operation between local and regional elected representatives.

This project, which will be implemented until 2015, is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation. The total budget amounts to € 1,480,000, of which € 560,000 is for the Congress’ activities

The project team, in consultation with the donor, developed options in particular with a view to helping central authorities set up a consultative council to allow dialogue on the administrative territorial reform, the decentralisation agenda, and any matter of concern to local and regional authorities, as requested by the Minister for Local Issues on 10 December 2013. A first round of consultations took place on 18 and 19 February 2014, when representatives of the Congress secretariat and one member of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, met the Minister for Local Issues to determine the terms of reference for the assistance in setting up the Consultative Council. Other meetings were held with all main stakeholders in the field in order to consult with them on the vision and the process of such intervention.

The second steering committee meeting took place in Tirana on 12 March 2014, in a positive atmosphere. It assessed progress to date and approved the new strategic directions and the yearly plan of operations for 2014.

Michel O’Brien (Ireland, SOC), Vice-President of the Congress and members Tatiana Badan (Moldova, ILDG), Helen Eadie (United Kingdom, SOC), Mikhel Jukhami (Estonia, EPP/CCE), Matej Gomboši (Slovenia, EPP/CCE) and Erwin Mohr (Austria, EPP/CCE) participated in several meetings of this project.

- **Armenia**

On 16 September 2013, the Council of Europe signed an agreement with the Government of Denmark for the implementation of the project “Support for the consolidation of local democracy in Armenia”, which is included in the Action Plan for Armenia 2012-2014, which comprises three lines of action, of which the third, proposed by the Congress, focuses on the strengthening of the leadership capacities of local elected representatives.

The project component implemented by the Congress aims at increasing local elected representatives’ knowledge of good practices in the field of local democracy, so as to ultimately improve local political governance in the country, and allow for successful implementation of the local government reform.

The project started on 1 October 2013 and will last until September 2015 for Line of Action III). The total budget is € 1,785, 000, including € 575,000 for the Congress’ activities.

In parallel, the Congress was also invited to participate in a peer-review exercise to help the Armenian Government develop the process for territorial administrative reform.

On 5 February 2014, the project was officially launched in the presence of Deputy Prime Minister Armen Gevorgyan, and the first steering committee meeting took place. On 5-6 February 2014 the Congress delivered the first leadership workshop, which is part of a two-year leadership development programme specifically developed for Armenian mayors. Congress members Knud Andersen (Denmark, ILDG), Vice-President of the Congress, and Matej Gomboši (Slovenia, EPP/CCE) took part in the workshop on a peer-to-peer basis. A second workshop is planned on 8 and 9 April 2014.

Furthermore, the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) expressed interest in co-operating with the Council of Europe and with the Congress on the development of a project aimed at

strengthening the Association of Communities (AAC) to become an effective organisation and an active advocator of the interests of local authorities. Negotiations are currently taking place among SDC, the Council of Europe and the Association.

- **Azerbaijan**

The Council of Europe draft action plan for Azerbaijan 2013-2015 has been approved by the GR-DEM and is to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers. The Congress proposes to contribute to the development of a comprehensive strategy for decentralisation through the drawing-up of a legislative framework for local democracy in compliance with its Recommendation 326(2012), thus complementing the proposal drafted by the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform. For the Congress it consists of undertaking a political dialogue in view of the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendation and reinforcing leadership capacities of local elected representatives.

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The Council of Europe is currently preparing an action plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2014-2015 which includes a project on local democracy, presented jointly by the Congress and the Centre of Expertise, to further strengthen democracy and good governance at local level in the country. Activities are planned in order to support the development of a roadmap for the implementation of the Congress' recommendations, which should be discussed during post-monitoring meetings. The first meeting took place on 10-11 December 2013 in Sarajevo with the participation of Congress rapporteurs Beat Hirs (Switzerland, ILDG) and Jean-Marie Belliard (France, EPP/CCE).

- **Georgia**

The Council of Europe action plan for Georgia 2013-2015 was launched on 6 February 2014 on the occasion of the visit of the Council of Europe Secretary General to Tbilisi. The Georgian Government included local governance in the action plan as one of the priority areas as it is currently considering undertaking a major local government reform.

The proposed three-year-long project takes into account Congress Recommendation 334(2013) on local and regional democracy in Georgia and includes several components: support to the reform and in particular to the process of consultation with local authorities and strengthening of the capacity of local elected representatives as leaders for change. The project also includes a component on citizen participation. Tengiz Shergelashvili, First Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia, attended the Monitoring Committee meeting on 19 February 2014 as part of the post-monitoring process.

- **Republic of Moldova**

The Council of Europe action plan for the Republic of Moldova 2013-2016 was launched in Chisinau on 14 March 2014 by the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe. The chapter on local democracy and decentralisation includes an action line on strengthening local democracy and governance drawn-up by the Congress in close collaboration with the association of local authorities (the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM)). It covers the following activities: establishing a post-monitoring dialogue in order to implement Recommendation 322(2012) which includes the issue of the distribution of powers and responsibilities between the centre and the regions; strengthening local political governance; increasing local elected representatives' capacities as drivers for change; promoting a dialogue with central and local authorities and consolidating the CALM as a major interlocutor between central and local authorities. The Congress was also invited to take part in a peer review exercise which took place in Chisinau from 3 to 6 March 2014 on the theme "delegated and own competences".

- **Russian Federation**

Local democracy is one of the priorities in the co-operation document for the Russian Federation in 2013-2014 which is currently being drafted. The Congress is ready to contribute to a project which has been developed by the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform. The project's main objectives are to improve the quality of local governance, to increase efficiency and effectiveness of

local administration, to promote sustainable policies and to improve citizens' access to services, as well as their involvement in public decisions.

- **Ukraine**

Given the political situation activities have been put on hold. The new government appointed on 27 February 2014 declared local self-government and decentralisation as one of their priorities.

Before the crisis, the situation was as follows, the 2011-2014 Council of Europe revised action plan for Ukraine was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 19 November 2013. On the occasion of its meeting in Kyiv on 12 June 2013, the action plan steering committee concluded that there was a need to reinforce efforts in the field of local democracy. The Congress and the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform jointly drafted a new project for 2014-2017. Negotiations are taking place between the Council of Europe and the new government of Ukraine to revise the action plan and adapt it to the new situation.

In the meantime, the Danish authorities had expressed their willingness to support the continuity of the actions led by the Council of Europe in the field of local democracy in Ukraine. A programme has been set up, with total funding of € 600,000 for a 15-month period, and is included in the revised action plan. It offers a follow-up to the activities aimed at strengthening the capacities of local and regional authorities and at providing the Ukrainian Government with legal assistance.

The contribution of the Congress to the programme would consist of two parts: one of them concerns post-monitoring dialogue with a view to the drawing up of a roadmap in 2014 in order to implement Congress Recommendation 348(2013) adopted at the 25th Congress Session on 31 October 2013; the other intends to focus on the training of young political leaders so they can develop their capacity to engage in future local elections.

iv. Council of Europe activities for the development and consolidation of democratic stability

- **Belarus**

The Congress has proposed activities to foster the development of local democracy in Belarus. This includes raising awareness on the European Charter of Local Self-Government among national authorities, local authorities and civil society in Belarus; sharing European experiences on the implementation of the Charter and providing an assessment of the compliance of Belarusian legislation and draft legislation with Council of Europe standards in the field of local democracy.

Following the discussions of Jean-Claude Frécon (France, SOC), President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, and Nataliya Romanova (Ukraine, ILDG), President of the Chamber of Regions, with the Belarus authorities, a seminar on the European Charter of Local Self-Government could take place in the second part of 2014.

- **Kosovo***

The Congress has developed a project aimed at raising authorities' and local elected representatives' awareness of decentralisation issues and of the role of local elected representatives with the objective of strengthening democratic values and governance in Kosovo.* This project is part of the Council of Europe's overview of co-operation activities in Kosovo,* which was discussed within the Committee of Ministers and between the Council of Europe and its main international partners.

Given difficulties following the local elections of November and December 2013, with constituting local councils and the refusal of Serb mayors to take office, the Council of Europe co-operation activities will be implemented in due course.

v. Co-operation with neighbouring regions of the Council of Europe

The Congress' proposals are part of the Council of Europe's policy towards neighbouring regions and are a response to requests received from the countries concerned.

- **Morocco**

The Congress is continuing to co-operate with Moroccan authorities, particularly following the adoption by the Parliament at the beginning of July of the draft law defining principles of territorial delineation of local governments, which should be translated concretely into the country's new territorial organisation.

The Congress has participated in this debate on advanced regionalisation by providing its expertise to the Consultative Commission on Regionalisation since its creation in 2010 and through a reinforced dialogue with Moroccan parliamentarians and local authorities.

Further informal contacts between Moroccan mayors and Congress members took place during the 2013 Lisbon Forum (6-7 November 2013). They will continue in 2014, in particular in the context of the preparation of the Partner for Local Democracy Statute, currently being discussed by the Bureau of the Congress. A first occasion was offered by workshops on the role of women in political life in Tunis (Tunisia) and Tetouan (Morocco) on 17 and 28 March 2014 at the initiative of the North-South Centre.

- **Tunisia**

The Congress continued its contacts with the Tunisian authorities in the framework of the Council of Europe's institutional aid. It participated in several consultation meetings between the representatives of the National Constitutional Assembly National Constituent Assembly (ANC) of Tunisia and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), in particular on Chapter VII of the final draft concerning local powers. In this regard, the Congress' comments – formulated by Christian Behrendt, Professor at the University of Liege, Belgium – were included within the official comments of the Venice Commission, released on 17 July 2013.

The study includes an analysis of the situation of local and regional democracy in Tunisia and recommendations and a report on other intergovernmental organisations' activities in Tunisia in this field. It is being drawn up with the participation of Néjl Baccouche, Professor of Law in the University of Sfax (Tunisia), and Christian Behrendt, Professor of Constitutional Law in the University of Liege (Belgium). It will be presented for comments to the new Tunisian authorities in due course.

Following the promulgation of the new Constitution of the Republic of Tunisia, the Congress Bureau adopted a declaration on 10 February 2014 welcoming the important step which this Constitution represents for the development of democracy in the country. Congress President, Herwig van Staa, also recalled that the Congress is ready to contribute to the effective implementation of local government, which is now based on the principle of decentralisation as well as of financial and administrative independence.

Local and regional democracy is enshrined in the text of the Constitution, which provides that municipal and regional councils are elected through general, free, direct, fair and transparent elections. The mechanisms of participatory democracy and the principles of open governance have also been incorporated. The recognition of the principle of financial autonomy, the target of achieving equivalence "between local resources and local burdens", as well as the State's undertaking to "guarantee women's representation in elected councils" have also been recognised.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I – Agenda of the 26th Session (25-27 March 2014)

CG(26)OJ1PROV

26th Session of the Congress

Strasbourg, Palais de l'Europe

25-27 March 2014

**DRAFT AGENDA
PUBLIC MEETING**

**THEME FOR 2014:
EMPOWERING YOUTH: A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR CITIES
AND REGIONS**

Members' attention is drawn to:

Electronic voting on texts will take place in the hemicycle and in Room 1. The voting handsets will be distributed at the entrance to the meeting rooms upon signature of the attendance register. []

Participants are reminded that access to the hemicycle is strictly limited to holders of badges which indicate the specific hemicycle symbol. Seating in the hemicycle will be allocated according to the seating plans available for consultation by the entrance.

Tabling written questions for oral reply (Office 1081): each member should limit herself/himself to one question. Please refer to the agenda for the deadlines.

The conditions and deadlines for tabling amendments (Office 1081): at the latest at 10.00 on the eve of the day when the texts to which they refer are to be discussed except for texts to be debated on Tuesday 25 March for which the deadline is 16.00 on Monday 24 March. Amendments must be signed by 5 delegates from at least two delegations for texts debated in plenary sittings or by any five delegates from at least two national delegations sitting in the Chamber of Local Authorities for debates in that chamber and by any five delegates sitting with full capacity in the Chamber of Regions for debates in that chamber. Each amendment must specify the name of the delegate who will submit it, ,

Registration of speakers for the debates: the form for registration of speakers for the debates, available at the entrance of the hemicycle and Room 1, (plenary sittings and sessions of the chambers) must be submitted to the Table Office secretariat seated in front of the President's rostrum for sittings in the hemicycle or to the secretariat of the President for the chamber meeting in Room 1.

Finance Office: Office 1040 and 1035

Table Office for any further questions: Office 1081.

Monday 24 March 2014 (eve of the session)

Bureaux meetings

9.30-10.30, Room 6	Bureau of the Chamber of Local Authorities
9.30-10.30, Room 7	Bureau of the Chamber of Regions
10.30-12.30 and 14.00-16.00, Room 8	Bureau of the Congress

Seminar on election observation – for Congress members 13.30 – 15.30

Room 1	Open to all members of the Congress, secretaries of delegation and advisers
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Political group meetings 16.30 – 18.30

Room 6	European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR)
Room 9	European People's Party Group in the Congress (EPP/CCE)
Room 10	Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG)
Room 11	Socialist Group (SOC)

Tuesday 25 March 2014

Committee meetings

8.30 – 10.45

Room 1	Monitoring Committee
Room 6	Current Affairs Committee
Room 8	Governance Committee

Tuesday 25 March 2014

11.00 – 12.30, Hemicycle

Plenary Sitting

Opening of the 26th Session of the Congress by the President of the Congress

Herwig VAN STAA

Verification of new members' credentials

Presentation by the rapporteurs:

Anders KNAPE, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE), and Ludmila SFIRLOAGA, Romania (R, SOC)

Debate and vote on the draft resolution [CG(26)2]

Deadline for tabling amendments: 16.00 Monday 24 March



Adoption of the draft agenda of the session

[\[CG\(26\)OJ1PROV\]](#)

Adoption of the draft minutes of the last sitting of the 25th Session (31 October 2013) **[CG(25)PV3]**

Adoption of the composition of the Congress committees

[CG(26)3]

Communication by the President of the Congress

Debate

Statement by Thorbjørn JAGLAND

Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Oral reply to questions from the floor

Suspension of the sitting

EVENT:

Reception offered in the framework of the Austrian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers in the lobby of the Hemicycle (at the close of the sitting)

Tuesday 25 March 2014

14.00 – 19.30 Hemicycle

Plenary Sitting

Austrian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (November 2013 – May 2014)

Statement by Andrä RUPPRECHTER, Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water, representing the Austrian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers

Oral reply to written questions [CG(26)4]

Deadline for tabling written questions: 15.00 Monday 24 March

SUSPENSION OF THE SITTING

Ceremony: 20 years promoting local and regional democracy

Statements by:

Herwig VAN STAA, President of the Congress

Luc VAN DEN BRANDE, Vice-President of the Committee of the Regions (CoR)

Anders KNAPE, Executive President of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

Hande ÖZSAN BOZATLI, President of the Assembly of European Regions (AER)

Signing ceremony of the co-operation agreement between the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of European Regions

Statements by:

Herwig VAN STAA, President of the Congress

Hande ÖZSAN BOZATLI, President of the Assembly of European Regions (AER)

RESUMPTION OF THE SITTING

Is there a real place for young people in local and regional democracy?

Statements by:

Martina JÖBSTL, Member of the Regional Parliament of Salzburg, Austria

Jacob SAKIL, Former Young Mayor of the London Borough of Lewisham, United Kingdom

Adriana DELGADO, on-line youth activist, Portugal

Emil BOC, Mayor of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Debate

Best practices of implementation of human rights at local and regional level in member states of the Council of Europe and other countries

Presentation by the rapporteur: Lars O. MOLIN, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE)

Statements by:

Lawrence EARLY, Jurisconsult, Registry of the European Court of Human Rights

Nils MUIŽNIEKS, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Maija SAKSLIN, Chairperson of the Management Board, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

Debate and vote on the draft resolution [\[CG\(26\)5PROV\]](#)

Deadline for tabling amendments 16.00 Monday 24 March

Urgent debate on the situation in Ukraine

Presentation by Marc COOLS, Belgium (L, ILDG), Vice-President of the Congress and Rapporteur on Ukraine

Statement by:

Maryna STAVNIYCHUK, Advisor to the President of Ukraine

Debate and vote on the draft declaration [\[CG\(26\)15PROV\]](#)

Deadline for tabling amendments 9.00 Tuesday 25 March

The situation of Leyla Güven and other local elected representatives in detention in Turkey

Presentation by the rapporteurs: Anders KNAPE, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE), and Leen VERBEEK, Netherlands (R, SOC)

Debate and vote on the draft resolution and the draft recommendation [\[CG\(26\)6PROV\]](#)

Deadline for tabling amendments 16.00 Monday 24 March

END OF THE SITTING

EVENT: Reception and cultural event offered by the Slovenian delegation to the Congress

Wednesday 26 March 2014

Chamber of Regions

9.00 - 12.00, Hemicycle

Opening by the President of the Chamber

Nataliya ROMANOVA

Adoption of the draft agenda of the Chamber

[CPR(26)OJ1PROV]

Communication by the President of the Chamber

[CPR(26)1]

Co-operation agreement between the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of European Regions: implementation

Fostering youth employment through education and training: role and best practices within regions in Europe

Statements by:

Csaba BORBOLY, member of the Education, Youth, Culture and Research Commission (EDUC) of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union

Reinhard ROHR, President of the Carinthia Parliament, Austria

Emmanuele BOBBIO, Minister for Training Research and University of the Toscana Region, Italy

Beat ROHNER, President of the Youth Regional Network of the Assembly of the European Regions (AER)

Debate

Implementing human rights policies at regional level

Statements by:

Bettina VOLLATH, Minister for Finance, Women and Integration in the Regional Government of Styria, Austria

Alan MILLER, Chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission, United Kingdom

Rafael RIBÓ I MASSÓ, Catalan Ombudsman, Spain

Debate

Close by the President of the Chamber

EVENT:

Reception and cultural event offered by the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Moldova and the Moldovan delegation to the Congress

Wednesday 26 March 2014

Chamber of Local Authorities

9.00 - 12.00, Room 1

Opening by the President of the Chamber

Jean-Claude FRECON

Adoption of the draft agenda of the Chamber

[\[CPL\(26\)OJ1PROV\]](#)

Communication by the President of the Chamber

[CPL(26)1]

Local democracy in Armenia

Presentation by the rapporteur: Nigel MERMAGEN, United Kingdom (L, ILDG)

Debate and vote on the draft recommendation [\[CPL\(26\)2PROV\]](#)

Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Tuesday 25 March



Being a local councillor today

Statements by:

René DOSIERE, Deputy of the French National Assembly

Michael SALOMO, Bürgermeister of Haßmersheim, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

Marcel BOOGERS, Member of the Council for Public Administration and Professor in innovation and regional governance, University of Twente, Netherlands

Debate

Digital media and urban mobilisation

Statements by:

Jan HANRATH, Fellow, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany

Kerem ÖKTEM, Fellow at Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey

Kristina BERDINSKIKH, Ukrainian blogger, Author of the "Maidaners" Facebook project

Debate

Close by the President of the Chamber

EVENTS:

Reception and cultural event offered by the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Moldova and the Moldovan delegation to the Congress

Wednesday 26 March 2014

14.00 – 19.00, Hemicycle

Plenary Sitting

Adoption of the draft minutes of the sittings of the Congress on 25 March 2014

[CG(26)PV1am] [CG(26)PV1pm]

Statement by Anne BRASSEUR, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Oral reply to questions from the floor

Local and regional democracy in the Netherlands

Presentation by the rapporteurs: Artur TORRES PEREIRA, Portugal (L, EPP/CCE), and Jean-Pierre LIOUVILLE, France (R, SOC)

Debate and vote on the draft recommendation [[CG\(26\)7PROV](#)]

Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Tuesday 25 March

Statement by Ronald PLASTERK, Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Netherlands

Oral reply to questions from the floor

Local and regional democracy in the United Kingdom

Presentation by the rapporteurs: Angelika KORDFELDER, Germany (L, SOC), and Alexander USS, Russian Federation (R, EPP/CCE)

Debate and vote on the draft recommendation [[CG\(26\)10PROV](#)]

Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Tuesday 25 March

Statement by Baroness STOWELL MBE, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, United Kingdom

Oral reply to written questions [CG(26)16]

Deadline for tabling written questions: 16.00 Tuesday 25 March

Empowering Roma youth through participation: effective policy design at local and regional levels

Presentation by the rapporteurs: Inger LINGE, Sweden (R, EPP/CCE), and John WARMISHAM, United Kingdom (L, SOC)

Statements by:

Orhan USEIN, Programme Coordinator, Decade of Roma Inclusion Foundation

Angel IVANOV, Member of the Bureau of the Forum of European Roma Young People

Debate and vote on the draft resolution and draft recommendation [[CG\(26\)8PROV](#)]

Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Tuesday 25 March

SUSPENSION OF THE SITTING

Signing ceremony of the co-operation agreement between the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the European Roma and Travellers Forum

Statements by:

Herwig VAN STAA, President of the Congress

Rudko KAWCZYNSKI, President of the European Roma and Travellers Forum

RESUMPTION OF THE SITTING

Strategy on the right of local authorities to be consulted by other levels of government

Presentation by the rapporteur: Anders KNAPE, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE)

Debate and vote on the draft resolution [[CG\(26\)9PROV](#)]

Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Tuesday 25 March

End of the sitting

20.00 *EVENT: Reception offered by the City of Strasbourg, at the Hôtel de Ville, Place Broglie (departure by shuttle bus to the Hôtel de Ville at 19.30 and 19.45)*

Thursday 27 March 2014

Bureau meeting

8.30 - 9.15, Room 8 Bureau of the Congress

Thursday 27 March 2014

9.30 - 12.00, Hemicycle

Plenary Sitting

Formal adoption of texts approved by the chambers

[CG(26)11]

Adoption of the draft minutes of the sittings of the Congress and of the chambers

on 26 March 2014 [CG(26)PV2], [CPL(26)PV1] and [CPR(26)PV1]

Youth participation – Voting at 16?

Statements by:

Gregor WENDA, Deputy Head, Department of Electoral Affairs, Federal Ministry of the Interior, Austria

Thomas LEYS, former member of the Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth

Debate

Post-monitoring dialogue in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Presentation by the rapporteurs: Beat HIRS, Switzerland (L, ILDG), and Jean-Marie BELLIARD, France (R, EPP/CCE)

Debate and vote on the draft resolution and draft recommendation [\[CG\(26\)13PROV\]](#)

Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Wednesday 26 March

Statements by:

Zoran MIKULIĆ, Minister of Justice, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Lejla REŠIĆ, Minister of Administration and Local Self-government of the Republika Srpska

Orlando FUSCO, Political Adviser - Head of Section, Governments, Parliaments and Political Parties, on behalf of the EUSR / EU Delegation, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Oral reply to written questions [CG(26)17]

Deadline for tabling written questions: 10.00 Wednesday 26 March

Local and regional democracy in Sweden

Rapporteurs: Luzette WAGENAAR-KROON, Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE), and Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM, Austria (R, SOC)

Presentation by the rapporteur: Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM, Austria (R, SOC)

Debate and vote on the draft recommendation [\[CG\(26\)12PROV\]](#)

Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Wednesday 26 March

Close of the 26th Session by the President of the Congress

EVENT: Screening of the film "Papusza", on the life of the Roma poetess Bronislawa Wajs in the projection room (off the main hall of the Palais)



APPENDIX II – Declaration on Ukraine

26th SESSION

Strasbourg, 25-27 March 2014

The situation in Ukraine

Declaration 2 (2014)¹

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe is deeply concerned at developments in the situation in Ukraine, particularly the attacks on the territorial integrity of the country.

2. It shares the concerns expressed on this subject by the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and more generally by the whole international community.

3. It does not accept the validity of the referendum, held on 16 March last, without the minimum democratic guarantees that should be in place for any vote and which are the preconditions required by the Congress when it observes local and regional elections.

4. This pseudo-consultation should on no account pave the way for a change of borders between Russia and Ukraine. The use of military force by Russia to redraw national boundaries is unacceptable. The Congress therefore condemns Russia's annexation of Crimea and Sebastopol in violation of international law. The occupation of territories of independent states, as we saw in 2008 in Georgia and are facing now in Ukraine is unacceptable in international law and should not be tolerated.

5. The Congress reiterates its full support for Crimea and Sebastopol to be an undisputed part of Ukraine and for the integrity of the Ukrainian territory to be restored. The Congress also urges all parties to fully respect human rights and the rule of law.

6. The Congress points out that prior to this referendum Crimea enjoyed a broad degree of autonomy and that this could, if necessary, have been strengthened in consultation with the Ukrainian national authorities. In this regard, it recalls its Recommendation 346 (2013) on Regions and territories with special status in Europe, which was adopted on 31 October 2013.

7. In addition, it lends its support to the new and legitimate Ukrainian authorities for any initiatives they take to strengthen democracy in their country and to protect the rights of all Ukraine's citizens, including those of cultural, national and linguistic minority groups, in the spirit of inclusiveness and to ensure genuine dialogue between all political forces.

8. In particular, this dialogue should enable all the persons belonging to a national minority in Ukraine, including the Russian-speaking population as well as the non-Russian speaking minorities of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, which was illegally annexed by the Russian Federation, to benefit fully from the provisions of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and those of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Lastly, it should lead to constitutional and administrative reforms providing this country with institutions which receive broad consensus and which, with regard to local and regional authorities, comply with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and those of the Reference Framework on Regional Democracy.

¹ Adoption by the Congress on 25 March 2014, 2nd Sitting (see Document [CG\(26\)15PROV](#), rapporteur: Marc COOLS, Belgium (L, ILDG).

9. The Congress refers to its recommendations adopted at its session held from 29 to 31 October 2013, further to the report on local and regional democracy in Ukraine, and in particular those calling for the:

a. removal of the constitutional and legislative restrictions to which the local authorities are subject and the reinforcement of subsidiarity by granting local authorities competence for a substantial share of public affairs;

b. transfer of the administrative competences of the districts and regions to elected bodies in order to establish an administration under their responsibility.

10. Such reform would strengthen democracy and the social, economic and territorial cohesion of Ukraine.

11. The Congress is ready to discuss with the new authorities the implementation of these recommendations. It is particularly willing to send a delegation to Ukraine, including the region of Crimea, to examine the situation in the country. It is also at the disposal of the Ukrainian authorities to take part in a mission to observe the local elections to be held in several Ukrainian towns and cities on 25 May 2014.

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.



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