



THE CONGRESS OF
LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES
COUNCIL OF EUROPE

ACTIVITY REPORT

(mid-December 2014 to mid-April 2015)

Communication by the
Congress Secretary General

at the 1225th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies
on 15 April 2015

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Introduction

The objective of this report is to provide an overview of the activities of the Congress in the last four months since the previous progress report presented mid-December 2014.

The statutory, operational and thematic activities implemented by the Congress contribute to improving the situation of local and regional democracy in the Council of Europe member states, ensuring the rule of law and promoting human rights at local and regional level.

The report contains detailed information on the 28th Session held from 24 to 26 March 2015 on the general theme "Local responses to the challenges of human rights - Migration, discrimination, social inclusion."

Other aspects of the statutory work of the Congress are also described in the report such as the monitoring of local and regional democracy in several member States (Poland, Norway, Greece), the post-monitoring dialogue (Georgia, Portugal, Ukraine) and the observation of local elections in the Republic of Moldova (Gagauzia) as well as the work of the Congress chambers and committees.

The co-operation activities implemented by the Congress which are described here are part of the Action Plans and co-operation programmes of the Council of Europe. They are the concrete follow-up of the recommendations resulting from the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government by the Congress.

The Congress also organises and participates in thematic activities which are among the priorities of the Council of Europe, such as the promotion of human rights, Roma inclusion, citizen participation, and youth participation in particular, the fight against extremism, racism, hate speech and the prevention of corruption.

Statement by Andreas Kiefer, Secretary General of the Congress - 1225th Meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, Wednesday, April 15, 2015

I would like to thank you for the good wishes and messages of congratulation I received after my re-election as Secretary General of the Congress. When elected for the first time, one is very happy of course. When presented and elected a second time, this is already a reaction to the work performed. I do appreciate this specific quality and I share this positive feedback with my colleagues in the Congress Secretariat.

Over the last five years the goal of our reform has been to establish the Congress as

- a political assembly addressing the pertinent questions for the residents in our villages, cities and regions and for our governments,
- a professional monitoring and election observation body,
- an efficient provider of operational projects in and with our member States in the follow-up to its resolutions and recommendations, and
- a proactive and reactive thematic actor of the Council of Europe working on the basis of the priorities of the Organisation.

The Committee of Ministers has politically supported this orientation and I am very grateful for this. At the beginning of this new mandate I would like to ensure this Committee that I am fully committed to contributing to the shaping and implementing of the Congress' political and operational activities in this spirit.

Post-monitoring dialogue

And it is in this spirit that the Congress has sought to achieve concrete results and impact when working on the local and regional dimension of the pertinent questions of the organisation. For example: we are very pleased that one and a half years after introducing the new post-monitoring policy of the Congress, which I presented to you on 11 December 2013, three countries have engaged in this dialogue.

In Ukraine we prepared a roadmap for legislative measures which will be presented to the Ukrainian authorities in May 2015. The Congress is also very pleased to contribute to and participate in the work of the Constitutional Commission of the Ukrainian Parliament - in close co-operation with the Venice Commission.

The example of Ukraine is not the only one:

After a positive post-monitoring programme Portugal recently ratified the Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority as well as the Additional Protocol to the European Outline-Convention on transfrontier co-operation between territorial communities or authorities. In the months to come, the Congress rapporteurs will submit the roadmap for legislative reforms based on the Congress Recommendation to the Minister responsible in Lisbon.

The Congress is also engaged in a fruitful dialogue with the Georgian government on a roadmap for a reform programme and we appreciate the quality of this co-operation very much [details in the written report].

Co-operation activities

The third phase after the monitoring report and the post-monitoring dialogue concerns co-operation activities.

On 23 March the Congress Bureau approved guidelines for the implementation of co-operation activities in Council of Europe member states. Our co-operation activities [are based on the monitoring and election observation reports as well as on the thematic reports prepared by the

Committees and adopted by the Congress. They] are implemented in the framework of Council of Europe action plans in close co-operation and synergy with other parts of the Organisation.

These guidelines focus on the areas in which the Congress can add specific experience and know-how, such as the role and the responsibilities of local and regional politicians, corruption and ethics, citizen participation at local level, cross-border co-operation, the democratic quality of electoral campaigns at local and regional level and human rights at local level, to mention just a few. You will find these guidelines in the appendix to my written activity report. They are yet another step towards concrete results and ever more professional performance.

28th Session, 24–26 March 2015

Our March session highlighted how the Congress reacts to the main challenges and needs of our member States, the preoccupations of our governments, of our local and regional authorities and our citizens. The Congress is not an academic forum, but a political body acting in a political environment. This is why we want to reflect this “Zeitgeist” and timeliness also in the agendas of the Congress sessions.

The session is a very good example of this: the general theme was “local responses to human rights’ challenges - migration, discrimination, social inclusion”.

I would particularly like to mention the debate on managing the flow of migration by local and regional authorities. We had the opportunity to listen to three mayors who are in the front line and face extremely difficult situations. They are the mayors of Calais in France, Siirt in Turkey and Lampedusa in Italy, where last weekend another humanitarian catastrophe happened and more than 400 migrants lost their lives. And this flow will continue.

I would also like to mention the debate on cities against terrorism in the Chamber of Local Authorities, where we listened to the mayor of Kobane, who described the situation in his town after its occupation by the Islamic State, as well as the battle for its liberation.

Same thing for the urgent debate on the fight against terrorism. As you know, after the attacks in Paris and Copenhagen in January and February 2015, the Secretary General asked the different entities of the Council of Europe to present concrete proposals for activities in order to develop a comprehensive Action Plan of our Organisation.

The Congress has been working for a long time on these issues. We therefore quickly reacted to this request, by preparing a strategy which identifies the work already done and which proposes new activities, organised around three pillars, to be implemented in the short, medium and long term. Based on this strategy, the Session adopted a Resolution presented by the Congress thematic rapporteur Leen Verbeek (this Resolution can be found in the appendix to the Activity Report).

In this context, you have also heard our rapporteur during the thematic debate held by the Committee of Ministers on 19 March.

Another example of timely discussions was the debate on Jewish cemeteries and the responsibility of local authorities. Following the terrible damage done to the Jewish cemetery just a few kilometres outside Strasbourg, in Sarre-Union, this debate gave us an opportunity to examine the role of local authorities in protecting our cultural identity, part of which are these cemeteries.

I would also like to refer to the debate on the regional dimension of the process of decentralisation in Ukraine, with the participation of Minister Nehoda and the President of the Venice Commission, Mr Buquicchio.

One more topical discussion during the Session concerned the United Kingdom and the prospects for devolution. In addition, in the Chamber of Regions we had the possibility to debate about the future of Scotland, following the September 2014 referendum.

Beyond all this, the members adopted three monitoring reports on Greece, Norway and Poland.

I would like to thank in particular the governments of Germany, Belgium, Norway, Poland, the United Kingdom and Ukraine for having participated so actively in our session via their representatives, Ministers or Secretaries of State. I would also like to thank the ambassadors for their support in organising these visits.

Resources

I have just presented to you the political direction and some of the results of our work. You will not be surprised to hear that the preparation and implementation of these political and operational activities require resources – human and financial resources. In the March the Session of the Congress adopted a recommendation on the financial resources for the next biennium 2016-2017. Members acknowledged the contributions of the Congress to the consolidation of the Council of Europe budget but expressed their grave concern that further constraints would seriously hamper the Congress capability to act.

I would like to draw your attention to the respective Recommendation and explanatory memorandum which outline the needs of the Congress to perform the activities that I just described. When you come to discuss the budget, as you will do soon, you know what the Congress is about and I trust that you will take into consideration the requirements to perform and to deliver the expected results.

Thank you!

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I. THE 28th SESSION OF THE CONGRESS – 24 TO 26 MARCH 2015

The Bureau of the Congress decided that the theme of the two sessions in 2015 would be on “Local responses to the challenges of human rights - Migration, discrimination, social inclusion”.

During its 28th Session, the Congress has dedicated several debates and events to specific aspects of human rights, such as local and regional authorities deal with migration flows, the awarding of the first prize of the “Diversity Advantage Challenge Award” and a presentation of the campaign against hate speech from the Council of Europe. The debate on migration flows has allowed members to listen to interventions from, among others, Mayors of Calais (France), Lampedusa (Italy) and Siirt (Turkey).

Several reports have been examined, in particular on rights of LGBT people and on Jewish cemeteries and their protection as cultural and religious heritage of Europe, the latter having been the subject of a debate in the Chamber of Local Authorities with the participation of the Rabbi and the Mayor of Strasbourg, and the former Minister of the Interior of Israel.

Moreover, several debates related to radicalization leading to terrorism were on the agenda, such as “the answers to radicalization in the cities and regions of Europe: combating terrorism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and hate speech”, with the participation of the Mayor of Vilvoorde (Belgium) and several academics and experts on deradicalization. Resolution 381 (2015) and Recommendation 371 (2015) were adopted at the end of the debate. The complementary debate about “Cities against terrorism” was held in the Chamber of Local Authorities in the presence, among others, of the Mayor of Kobané, a city in Syria, located on the Turkish border. In his statement, he described the situation of his city. 70% of it having been destroyed by the attacks of the so-called Islamic state, and now under the threat of the mines left behind by the terrorists and subject to health and humanitarian emergencies. He called on the Congress to come and see the situation there. An invitation to visit the boarder area was also expressed by the Head of the Turkish delegation in the Congress.

The United Kingdom was the subject of two thematic debates – the first in the Chamber of Regions on “Scotland after the referendum of 18 September 2014” and the second in the Plenary on “Devolution prospects in the UK”, with the participation of representatives of the UK Government, the Scottish Parliament, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the local Government Association of England and Wales. The Chamber of Regions also held a debate on “The regional dimension of the decentralization process in Ukraine”, with the Deputy Minister of Regional Development of Ukraine.

As part of its monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the Congress considered reports and adopted recommendations on the situation of local and regional democracy in Greece, Norway and Poland, in the presence of the State Secretary at the Ministry of Administration and Digitization of Poland and the State Secretary of Local Government and Modernisation of Norway.

The Deputy-Minister-President and Minister of Culture, Employment and Tourism of the Belgian German-speaking Community addressed the Congress on behalf of the the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

The Congress hosted again this week a group of young delegates invited to take part in the Session. They contributed to all debates and meetings and had a training seminar to reflect on the best way to involve youth on the long term in the Congress’ work. At the end of the Session, the youth delegates presented their proposals to Gudrun Mosler-Törnström, President of the Chamber of Regions, and John Warmisham, Congress Vice-President, who was also representing the Congress’ newly created ad hoc reflection group on the participation of young people in the Congress’ work (see II. D.).

The Congress also conducted the election of its Secretary General.

A vacancy notice was published on 3 September 2014 and the election process started in October 2014, when the Bureau of the Congress appointed the members of the Pre-selection Committee. The Pre-selection Committee reviewed the list of five candidates submitted to the President of the Congress by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, out of a total of 37 candidates who had responded to the vacancy notice. It decided to meet all five candidates for an interview and submitted to the Bureau a detailed report containing the list of candidates in order of preference, recommending that only the candidate heading the list selected by the Committee should be presented for election to the Congress.

On 2 February 2015, the Bureau considered the report of the Committee and decided to act on the basis of its recommendations.

The outgoing Secretary General Andreas Kiefer was re-elected by acclamation for a mandate of five years.

II. POLITICAL AGENDA

A. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

Declaration by the President after terrorist attacks in Paris

Following the terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015, Jean-Claude Frécon, President of the Congress declared: "The attacks against Charlie Hebdo is an ignoble act of barbarism which revolts us. The murderers contemptibly killed police officers, journalists, several men and one woman. But they did not act haphazardly; they wanted to silence the free press that is the hallmark of our democracy. In tribute to the memory of the victims and to their courage, it behoves all believers in democracy to mobilise in order that freedom of expression may remain the cement that bonds our democratic society and rule of law may prevail over terrorism".

Adoption of an anti-radicalization strategy by the Congress Bureau

Following the terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe has proposed strengthening of the Organization's activities against radicalization leading to terrorism. Within this comprehensive Action Plan of the Organization, the Congress has prepared a strategy which identifies the work already done and proposes new activities organized around three pillars to implement short, medium and long term, with national governments, regions and cities.

Bureau declaration on the Kobane corridor

In a declaration adopted on 26 March 2015, the Bureau of the Congress expressed its solidarity and support with the population and local government administration of Kobane, as well as with the other cities in the region, which have been and continue to be victims of extremism. It called on the Turkish authorities to keep their border open with a permanent and safe corridor, and to allow free passage of all consignments of medicine and medical supplies, as well as of essential foodstuffs for the civilian population. The Declaration was adopted following the presentation of the Mayor of Kobané to the Chamber of Local Authorities, on 25 March during the Congress 28th Session.

Declaration by the President on Russia-South Ossetia "agreement"

Following the Russian Federation's signature of the so-called "treaty on alliance and integration" with the South Ossetia region in Georgia, the President of the Congress made the following statement on the fringes of the Session: "I deeply deplore this provocative initiative: one year after illegally annexing Crimea and Sevastopol and less than six months after signing a similar "treaty" with Abkhazia, another Georgian region, the Russian Federation is committing a further transgression by signing a text which, once again, gravely violates the territorial integrity and sovereignty of a Council of Europe member State and all the international commitments entered into by Russia when joining the Council of Europe. This initiative threatens the stability of an entire region of Europe and is yet another example of Russian interference on the territory of its neighbours. We ask Russia to definitively desist from exerting this kind of pressure on its neighbours". The Congress had already spoken out on 3 December 2014 to criticise the signing of a similar 'treaty' with Abkhazia, a region of Georgia.

Statement by the President on the occasion of the International Roma Day

The President published a statement on 8 April 2015 where he underlined that the inclusion of Roma requires a real mobilization of cities and regions because it is inside their territories and infrastructures that answers can be given. The Alliance for Roma Inclusion which has been established by the Congress in 2013 is a platform whose main objective is to promote the exchange of good practices and experiences between cities and regions participating to the Alliance in the field of Roma inclusion.

B. CONGRESS ACTIVITIES IN UKRAINE

Post-monitoring dialogue

Ukraine received two monitoring visits in 2012 and 2013, which gave rise to a recommendation adopted in October 2013 (REC 348 (2013)). The follow up of this recommendation is being carried out as part of a post-monitoring dialogue which comprises several post-monitoring units (PMUs). The first PMU was held in Kyiv from 8-9 December 2014 and led to the joint development by the Congress delegation and the authorities, of an intermediate roadmap that was communicated to the Government in December 2014.

On 12 March 2015, the second and the third PMU focused in particular on constitutional reform (Chapter XI on local self-government) and the financial independence of local authorities, as well as conditions of implementation of the new law on amalgamation. The Congress delegation headed by rapporteur Marc Cools (Belgium, ILDG) worked on specific aspects of the recommendation during meetings with Ukrainian authorities.

A final road map for implementing the Congress recommendations, drawn up in cooperation with the Ukrainian authorities, will be officially delivered to the government in the spring of 2015.

Following these meetings, the Ukrainian government asked the Congress to participate in the work of the Committee on the Constitutional Review. The Congress has appointed his adviser on constitutional issues to be represented in this Committee.

Cooperation activities

Two regional training seminars were organized in Odessa from 9 to 11 December 2014 and in Dnipropetrovsk from 3 to 5 March 2015 with young local leaders of NGOs, youth wings of political parties as well as local elected representatives who had discussions with members of the Congress and experts. These seminars enabled the participants to exchange views with young Congress members as well as with Ukrainian and European experts. Best practices on how to enhance citizen participation and conduct electoral campaigns were put forward during the discussions; and strengthened the commitment of the participants to implement and develop new initiatives in their cities and regions, such as: public municipal councils, youth councils, open budgets, wider use of IT for citizen participation.

These two sessions were the last of a series of seminars organised by the Congress as part of the project: "Strengthening the capacity of local authorities in Ukraine" and the Council of Europe action Plan for Ukraine.

Moreover, on 6 March 2015, ALDA - The European Association of Local Democracy Agencies, with the support of the Congress, organised a workshop to present the Local Democracy Agency which will be launched in Dnipropetrovsk (Ukraine) on 18 May 2015 and to identify the needs of local civil society organisations, so as to better support them in the implementation of their projects.

C. CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS: BELGIUM

The Congress contributed actively to several events organised by the Belgian presidency of the Committee of Ministers in Brussels:

- Bureau meeting on 1st December 2014 (Cf IV A.)
- Conference of election and European governments, in cooperation with the Venice Commission, on the theme "Ensuring neutrality, impartiality and transparency of the elections - the role of Electoral Management", from 30 to 31 March 201 (CF III D.)
- thematic workshop on "electronic tools for local democracy: collect, transmit and decide" on 1st April organised by the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG).

Isabelle Weykmans, Deputy-Minister-President, Minister of Culture, Employment and Tourism of the Belgian German-speaking Community, addressed the 28th Session of the Congress, on behalf of the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. She stressed in particular: "The European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified now by all Member States is a major treaty. By re-establishing national reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in member states and on the development works of the principles of the Charter, the Congress is doing valuable work".

The Congress will also participate in the Council of Europe ministerial conference on heritage, in Namur on 23 and 24 April 2015.

D. YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Following the success of the experiment to invite one young person per national delegation to participate in the Congress' 27th Session last October, the Bureau approved a proposal to set up an ad hoc reflection group on the participation of young people in the Congress' work. The group, which is composed of two vice-presidents (one for the Chamber of Regions, one for the Chamber of Local Authorities), the Congress' new Thematic Spokesperson on Youth and three representatives of the Council of Europe Youth Sector's co-management system, is tasked with drawing up a proposal for improving the participation of young people in a sustainable manner thus enabling the mainstreaming of youth issues in the Congress' work and texts. The group will submit its proposals to the first meeting of the Bureau in 2016.

Furthermore, the Congress invited fifteen of the October 2014 youth delegates to return to Strasbourg for the March 2015 Session. The aim was to provide space for them to reflect on and formulate their vision of how the Congress could implement a mechanism for structured dialogue with young people. The youth delegates took active part in the 28th Session, taking the floor on numerous occasions, and presented their vision of youth participation to Congress representatives on the final afternoon. Their innovative proposals will be submitted to the ad hoc group for its consideration during its first meeting in May 2015.

As part of its on-going project to promote youth participation, in March the Bureau approved the terms of reference for a report on voting at 16 and the consequences on youth participation at local and regional levels.

Furthermore, the Congress' Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life is being translated into Azeri, Bulgarian, Greek, Hungarian, Ukrainian and Belarusian. This will mean the Charter will soon be available in 20 languages.

The Congress took part in March in the meeting to prepare the Youth Department's Enter! Youth Meeting in view of the role local and regional authorities play in defining policies to facilitate young people's access to their social human rights. A number of Congress members will be invited to take part in the meeting to exchange ideas with the participants on the type of policies that are needed.

III. INSTITUTIONAL CO-OPERATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

A. THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR

The Committee of Ministers

In the frame of the regular dialogue with the Committee of Ministers, the Secretary General of the Congress presented his communication to the Deputies on 15 December 2015.

The Chair of the Rapporteur Group on Democracy (GR-DEM), Ambassador Astrid Helle, Permanent Representative of Norway to the Council of Europe, met the Bureau of the Congress on 2 February 2015 (Cf II.A).

Congress Vice-President Leen Verbeek (Netherlands, SOC) took part in thematic debate on the Council of Europe Action Plan to combat extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism, held by the GR-DEM on 19 March 2015, in Strasbourg. He underlined that combating terrorism is primarily a national task, but it also involves action at local and regional level, underlining that the prevention of radicalisation is one of the priorities of the Congress work.

B. THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

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

During the Women Mayors' Summit held in Istanbul in March 2015, the Vice President of the Congress Barbara Toce and Gülsün Bilgehan, Chair of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination the Parliamentary Assembly exchanged information on how the two Assemblies could work together to support the initiative to make this event a regular platform bringing together women mayors.

The secretariats of the two Assemblies are currently working closely together to identify concrete synergies to be implemented in their respective fields of activities. The Congress thematic Rapporteur on children will attend the 23rd meeting of the Network of contact parliamentarians to stop sexual violence against children, organised by PACE, which will take place on 20 May 2015 in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova.

C. THE COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The Commissioner for Human Rights encourages 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. Regular meetings are held between the Commissioner and the Congress.

The Commissioner will participate to the Conference on "Facing Human Rights challenges at local and regional level" jointly organised by the Congress together with the Land of Styria, the city of Graz and the European Training and Research Centre on 28-29 May 2015 in Graz, Austria.

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 Congress institutional representatives to the CDE – as of December 2014 - are the Chair of the Monitoring Committee Philippe Receveur (Switzerland, PPE/CCE) and Stewart Dickson (United Kingdom, ILDG). Furthermore, Congress' Thematic Spokesperson for the observation of local and regional elections, Jos Wielen (Netherlands, EPP/CEE) has been elected new President of the CDE on 23 March 2015.

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.

The President of the Venice Commission Gianni Buquicchio participated in the debate on Ukraine held during the 28th Session of the Congress. He underlined that decentralisation makes it easier for people to identify with the country they live in, recalling that decentralisation is not leading to separatism but is the alternative to separatism. He said it was of decisive importance for Ukraine to carry out a successful decentralisation this year, at the constitutional and legislative level, with specific rules for the separatist-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

At the 12th European Conference of Electoral Management Bodies (EMB), co-organised by the Venice Commission in the framework of the Belgian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe on 30 and 31 March in Brussels, Jos Wielen (moderated a workshop on norms regarding media neutrality during electoral campaigns. The participants discussed, in particular, different facets of "media neutrality", the issue of ethics in journalism and media ownership.

On 30 March, Congress' Secretary General Andreas Kiefer moderated the 2nd Plenary Session on "Functioning of Electoral Management Bodies – good practice", focussing on the setup,

responsibilities and roles of electoral bodies, legal frameworks and technologies used by different countries. He also presented the major activities of the Congress in the field of election observation.

The institutional co-operation activities with Morocco and Tunisia are conducted in close collaboration with the Venice Commission.

IV. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES

A. BUREAU

Strasbourg, 2 February 2015

The Bureau members held an exchange of views with Ambassador Astrid Emilie Helle, Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers' Rapporteur Group on Democracy (GR-DEM) and Permanent Representative of Norway.

The Chairperson supported in particular the initiatives taken by the Congress to combat radicalization in the cities and regions and the participation of youth delegates to the work of the Congress after their active contribution to the Octobre 2014 Session. The President of the Congress thanked Ms Helle for the encouragement given to the Congress' priorities, which were fully consistent with those of the Council of Europe. Karl-Heinz Lambertz (Belgium, SOC), the Congress Thematic Spokesperson on co-operation with the Council of Europe intergovernmental sector, welcomed the commitment of the Ministers' Deputies to facilitating dialogue between the Congress and the national authorities, which had helped accelerate the implementation of Congress recommendations in some states.

This exchange was part of the political dialogue that the Congress has increased with the member States and their representatives in the Committee of Ministers. It was agreed to have further exchanges of that kind in the future.

The members of the Bureau also discussed the following items: the future election of the new Secretary General, the budget, the anti radicalization strategy in cities and regions, the final report of the World Forum on Democracy, the revisions of the Charter and Rules of Procedure of the Congress, the follow-up proposal to youth participation at the 27th Session, the draft agenda of the 28th Session, as well as the situation in Ukraine, the designations of Congress representatives to outside bodies.

Strasbourg, 23 and 26 March 2015

The Bureau informed about its decision to have 15 of the 34 youth delegates already present at the Session of October 2014 participate in the 28th Session. It also discussed the agenda of the 28th Session, the anti radicalization strategy 2015-2016, the theme of the 2015 edition of the European Week of Local Democracy "Living together in multicultural societies: respect, dialogue, interact" promoting public ethics and preventing corruption at local and regional level as well as the situation in Ukraine.

It agreed on the new configuration of the Contact Group Congress-Committee of the Regions that will meet once a year. The Bureau took note of the proposed activities planned with the future Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina of the Committee of Ministers.

It adopted a set of guidelines for improving the impact of the recommendations of the Congress in the Council of Europe Member States, as part of the cooperation activities, which have increased substantially since their establishments in 2012. These guidelines take into consideration recent Congress Resolutions on the political dialogue within monitoring, post-monitoring activities and elections observations. It also enables the promotion of local governance by carrying out activities in the thematic priorities set out by in the Congress for 2013-2016.

B. THE CHAMBER OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Chamber began its 28th Session with a debate on Jewish cemeteries. Adopting a Resolution on the responsibility of local authorities in this context, the Chamber reaffirmed that Jewish cemeteries

are an integral part of the European cultural heritage and must be protected from damage and desecration. The Resolution asks local authorities in member states to promote the preservation of holy Jewish burial sites, for example by ensuring that urban planning projects are supervised in order to avoid the violation or deterioration of those sites, and to take the necessary steps within their responsibilities to protect them. The Resolution calls on them to engage in dialogue with heritage preservation associations and representatives of Jewish communities, to draw on the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (“Faro Convention”) and to encourage local authorities to join the Council of Europe’s Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes, which would offer them the opportunity to participate in the European Route of Jewish Heritage. The debate included speeches by Yossi Beilin, former Minister of Justice of Israel, Roland Ries, Mayor of Strasbourg, Mendel Samama, Rabbi of Strasbourg and Abraham Ginsberg, Executive Director of Preservation Committee of European Jews Cemeteries (CPJCE).

The second debate in the Chamber Session was an “urgent debate” devoted to role of Europe’s towns and cities in the fight against terrorism. Guilherme Pinto, President of the European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS), opened the debate, underlining that towns and cities have a key role to play in the fight against terrorism by combating stereotyping and exclusion, fostering integration and encouraging all citizens to participate in the life of the community. Mr Pinto called on local authorities to make citizen participation a cross-cutting principle of security policies by involving civil society in the whole policy-making process. Some participants in the debate drew attention to “the danger of stereotyping all Muslims as terrorists” and stressed that the persistence of conflicts in the Middle East, and especially in Syria, could have dramatic consequences for all the countries of Europe.

Mustapha Abdi, Mayor of Kobane, a Kurdish-majority Syrian town on the border with Turkey, took the floor during the debate and described the attacks launched against the town for several months in 2014 by Islamic State. Adding that his town had become the world capital of resistance to the IS, Mr Abdi informed the Chamber that it was now in ruins and incapable of providing its inhabitants with basic services, such as drinking water, food and medicine. He called on the Congress to visit Kobane to assess the situation at first hand. Describing Kobane as a “symbol of the fight against barbarity”, members of the French delegation to the Congress announced an initiative by their national delegation, which would be calling on French local authorities to provide aid to Kobane. They were followed in this by other national delegations, which identified with the authorities concerned the type of aid they could most usefully provide to Kobane.

C. THE CHAMBER OF REGIONS

During its 28th Session, in line with current topical events, on 25 March 2015, the Chamber held two thematic debates: one on “Scotland after the 18 September 2014 Referendum” introduced, by Lord Wallace Of Tankerness, Advocate General for Scotland, representative of the UK Government, Christina McKelvie, Convenor of the Scottish Parliament’s European and External Relations Committee, and Harry McGuigan, Spokesperson of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) and the second on “The regional dimension of the decentralization process in Ukraine”, with Ukrainian Deputy Minister of Regional Development Vyacheslav Nehoda and the President of the Venice Commission Gianni Buquicchio.

In her conclusions, the President of the Chamber Gudrun Mosler-Törströmm underlined that the decentralisation process in Ukraine is on the right track, which is a major progress for the country. She recalled that democracy must be rooted at local and regional level, and this is even more important given the present political situation that Ukraine is facing. The Chamber will continue to follow this issue carefully, building on the fact that the new Action Plan for Ukraine 2015-2017, launched in March by Council of Europe Secretary General comprises a strong local and regional democracy dimension.

Concerning the debate on Scotland the President confirmed that the way the United Kingdom and Scottish authorities had dealt with the people of Scotland’s aspirations for reinforced autonomy or independence can indeed be regarded as a best democratic practice, and a source of inspiration for other similar cases throughout Europe. She said the debate had shown the importance of the changes which are currently taking place in the United Kingdom.

Moreover, the President presented a strategic document approved by the Bureau on 2 February 2015 on the “Priorities of the Chamber for 2015-2016 – Promoting Regional Democracy throughout Europe”. The Chamber set its priorities for the biennium deciding to continue following topical issues concerning the regions: political developments and results of elections at regional level,

regionalisation and devolution in Europe (also in the context of the economic crisis); regional and minority languages issues; human rights policies at regional level; promoting public ethics and preventing corruption at regional level and interregional co-operation.

D. THE COMMITTEES

The Monitoring Committee

The Committee held a meeting on 6 February 2015 in Matosinhos (Portugal) and approved the draft recommendations on local and regional democracy in Norway and Greece, which have been submitted for adoption to Congress at its Session in March 2015. The Committee also discussed and approved the draft resolution and recommendation on the electoral rolls and voters residing de facto abroad, also submitted for adoption at the March 2015 Session.

The Committee examined complaints about the regional redistribution of France and decided to advance the date of the visit of monitoring of the Charter concerning France.

Finally, the members of the Committee held discussions on the post-monitoring activities on Ukraine and Georgia, countries to which a roadmap, developed jointly with the national authorities, will be addressed respectively during Spring 2015.

The Monitoring Committee held its second meeting of 2015 on 24 March 2015 on the sidelines of the 28th Session of Congress. It examined complaints from the Hungarian minority in Romania and heard a member of the Romanian delegation to the Congress. The Committee concluded that these complaints were not within the competence of the Congress and it was for the Romanian national authorities to address this issue in the Romanian national framework.

The Committee also took note of the dates of the monitoring visit to France set on 26 to 29 May 2015, and the holding of the International Forum on Human Rights at local and regional level co-organized by the Congress with the City of Graz and the province of Styria and with the European Research Centre on Human Rights in Graz on 28 and 29 May in Graz (Austria). The members of the Committee took note of the outcome of the election observation mission of the Governor (Bashkan) in Gagauzia (Republic of Moldova), in March 2015. Finally, the Commission also approved the terms of office for preparing of a report on voting at 16 years – consequences on youth participation at local and regional level.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 17 September 2015 in Warsaw, Poland.

The Governance Committee

At its meeting in Strasbourg on 24 March 2015, the Governance Committee elected Andreas Galster (Germany, EPP/CCE), as 5th Vice-President of the Committee. The Committee approved a preliminary draft report and resolution on 'E-media: Game changer for local and regional politicians', which examines the growing use of e-engagement tools such as Voter Advice Applications (VAAs). These texts will be submitted to the Congress for adoption during the 29th plenary Session in October 2015.

The Rapporteurs updated the Committee on the preparation of their respective reports on "Principles, frameworks and procedures to modify status, competences and borders of regions and of autonomy statutes within domestic law", "Conditions of office of local and regional elected representatives" and 'New forms of local and regional governance'.

The Committee also approved new terms of reference for a report on "Gender Budgeting".

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 12 June 2015 in Strasbourg.

The Current Affairs Committee

The Current Affairs Committee held its first meeting of 2015 on 24 March, on the margins of the 28th Session of Congress. It approved the draft resolution on "Partnerships between local and regional authorities and civil society to promote active citizenship and participation" and heard the rapporteurs on the progress of their respective reports the feminization of poverty, the impact of austerity measures on children, women's participation in political life and new forms of youth participation.

The members of the Committee were informed of the holding of a seminar for national associations of local and regional authorities in the Netherlands in summer 2015 to raise awareness among local authorities on the Pact of cities and regions against sexual violence towards children. They took note of the signing of the Pact by the Minister of Health, Family and Social Affairs of the German-speaking Community of Belgium.

The Committee also took note of the mandate for a thematic rapporteur on youth, approved by the Bureau. Finally, the Committee members welcomed a proposal to adopt the report in 2017 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The next meeting will be held in late June or early July (date and location to be determined).

V. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY

A. MONITORING ACTIVITIES

The Congress' mission is to assess the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in each member state. This monitoring enables constructive political dialogue to be engaged with authorities in member states about local and regional democracy issues. The Congress undertakes regular general country-by-country monitoring exercises; it can also examine a particular aspect of the Charter. In addition, it can carry out urgent fact-finding missions to look into cases of concern.

After the visits, reports, recommendations and resolutions are being prepared that are submitted for adoption to the plenary sessions. Numerous legislative reforms have been set in motion by member states on the basis of the findings of these monitoring activities.

Monitoring visits

Luxemburg (3 -5 March 2015)

A Congress delegation led by rapporteurs Dorin Chirtoacă (Republic of Moldova, EPP/CCE) and Marianne Hollinger (Switzerland, ILDG) examined the follow-up action taken on the commitments made by Luxembourg in the sphere of local democracy when it ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1987. The delegation met, in particular, Dan Kersch, Minister of the Interior, Viviane Ecker, President of the Council of State, Mars di Bartolomeo, President of the Chamber of Deputies, Georges Santer, President of the Constitutional Court and Anne Brasseur, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and an MP representing the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The delegation will also be meeting Lydie Err, Ombudsman of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the mayors of the municipalities of Luxembourg, Schengen and Schuttrange and some representatives of the Luxembourg delegation to the Congress. The last report on local democracy in Luxembourg had been adopted by the Congress in 2005.

Adopted recommendations

Greece

During the 28th Session Recommendation 372 (2015) on the local and regional democracy in Greece was adopted. The rapporteurs Artur Torres Pereira (Portugal, EPP/CCE) and Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, SOC) noted the progress made by the country since the previous recommendation of the Congress in 2008, thanks in particular to the adoption of the "New architecture of autonomy and decentralization - the Kallikratis Program". They underlined that this reform is an important step towards a more decentralized territorial organization, particularly with regard to the status of prefectures and one of the thirteen administrative regions that were once regional emanations of the central government. The Congress call on the Government to review the legislation so as to confer statutory powers on local authorities and to ensure that the transfer of competences is accompanied by adequate concomitant financial resources, which local authorities may dispose of freely within the framework of their powers.

Poland

During the 28th Session, the Recommendation 373 (2015) on the local and regional democracy in Poland was adopted following a visit to the country from 20 to 23 May 2014 by Jos Wiene (Netherlands, EPP/CCE), rapporteur on local democracy and Cynthia Hughes (UK, SOC), rapporteur on regional democracy. The report, globally positive, welcomes the fact that the scope of local autonomy is respected and that the Polish local authorities have a broad scope for making autonomous decisions. The Congress, however, recommends that national authorities to ensure the concurrent financing of delegated tasks and to ensure that regulatory frameworks sometimes to dense do not restrict the exercise of the powers of local authorities.

Norway

During the 28th Session, the Recommendation 374 (2015) on local and regional democracy in Norway was adopted following a visit to the country by the rapporteurs, Xavier Cadoret (France, SOC) and Guilherme Pinto (Portugal, SOC) from 9 to 11 September 2014. The report underlines the very high level of local democracy in this country. The recommendation, however, invites the Norwegian authorities to integrate the principles of local autonomy in law and as far as possible in the constitution to guarantee local authorities the right to a judicial remedy against decisions taken by the administration of the State and to reassess the current situation of administrative control on the competences of local authorities.

B. POST MONITORING DIALOGUE

The post-monitoring is a procedure established by Congress to ensure more effective monitoring of the implementation of its recommendations to member states on local and regional democracy. This procedure is initiated at the joint request of the authorities of a State and the Congress. It is essentially based on political dialogue with the Congress and only strictly concerns the recommendations adopted by the Congress with regard to the countries that have accepted the post-monitoring.

A Programme of Post Monitoring (PMP) is therefore prepared in consultation with the authorities, which includes one, two or three post-monitoring units (PMU) which consist of discussion sessions on the implementation of certain recommendations identified as being a priority. Once these PMUs are completed, a roadmap including a timetable, previously approved by the national authorities is officially presented to the government during a ceremony that reflects the political commitment of the latter to implement the recommendations and the completion of the post-monitoring procedure.

Post-monitorings that were undertaken in Ukraine, Georgia and Portugal are particularly positive examples and reveal how the political dialogue can lead to positive developments in relatively short time.

Georgia (16 December 2015)

A post-monitoring unit was held which mainly concerned the constitutional amendment to insert a specific reference to the principle of subsidiarity in the Georgian Constitution, local finances and the consultation process with the National Association of local authorities. In this respect, rapporteurs Nigel Mermagen (United Kingdom, GILD), and Helen Pilhajasaari (Finland, SOC) noted some positive changes in the meantime since the adoption of the recommendation of the Congress (Recommendation 334 (2013)). A draft roadmap is under preparation and should be addressed to the authorities in spring 2015, which will close a fruitful political dialogue with the authorities of the country in the implementation of the recommendation of the Congress.

Portugal (5 February 2015)

A delegation from the Congress led by Congress rapporteur Jos Wiene (the Netherlands, EPP/CCE) examined the follow-up given to Recommendation 323 (2012) on local and regional democracy in this country. The delegation met with Manuel Rodrigues, Secretary of State for Finance, António Leitão Amaro, Secretary of State for Local Administration as well as Alfredo Monteiro, Vice-Chair of the Board of Direction of the ANMP (Associação Nacional de Municípios Portugueses) and Artur Torres Pereira (Portugal, EPP/CCE), Deputy Head of the Portuguese Delegation to the Congress and President of the Municipal Assembly of Sousel. The visit aimed at developing with the Portuguese national authorities a road map which will be officially presented to the Portuguese Government in the first half of 2015.

Ukraine (10 December 2014 and 12 March 2015) Cf II.B

C. THE OBSERVATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS

Observation mission to Gagauzia (Republic of Moldova, 19-23 March 2015)

A 10 member Congress' delegation, led by Lars O. Molin (Sweden, EPP-CCE), including two participants from the EU Committee of the Regions observed the elections of the Governor (Bashkan) and partial elections of the Popular Assembly of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, Republic of Moldova, on 22 March 2015. The delegation stated that the elections were held in an overall calm and peaceful atmosphere, technically well prepared and without major incidents, except some individual complaints.

However, according to the Rapporteur, three issues in the area of electoral law and management need to be mentioned: the inconsistency between the Republic of Moldova and the Gagauz region with regard to legal provisions, the considerably high number of voters on supplementary lists throughout the region and the question of campaign financing of candidates. A detailed information report is under preparation and will address, among other issues, the political future and co-operation with the central Government in Chisinau of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia under the newly elected Bashkan Irina Vlah who won the elections in the first round and was during the campaign openly supported by high-ranking Russian officials.

VI. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES

A. YOUTH

Call for applications: European Youth Capital 2018

Since 2014 the Congress has been endorsing partner of the EYC project European Youth Capital (EYC) which encourages municipalities to implement innovative projects to promote the active participation of young people in society. This title is awarded to a European municipality for a period of one year, during which it is given the opportunity to showcase its youth-related cultural, social, political and economic policies. Cluj-Napoca (Romania) is the 2015 European Capital. In 2016 Ganja (Azerbaijan) will take over and then Varna (Bulgaria) in 2017. A call has been launched to find the 2018 EYC.

B. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Signature of Pact of Towns and Regions to stop sexual violence against children by the German-speaking Community of Belgium (Eupen (Belgium), 27 January 2015)

Antonios Antoniadis, Minister for Family Affairs, Health and Social Affairs of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (DSG), signed the Pact of Towns and Regions to stop sexual violence against children during a ceremony in the presence of Josef Neumann (Germany, EPP/CEE), vice-Chair of the Current Affairs Committee of the Congress. Minister Antoniadis explained that the DSG's strategy had been drawn up following a detailed analysis of the Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. The Congress' Pact has been signed by about 60 towns and regions, including Berlin, Liverpool, Prague, Nicosia, Lausanne, Tirol.

C. HUMAN RIGHTS

Presentation of Congress activities in promoting human rights at the grassroots (Brussels, 17 December 2014)

EU Justice Commissioner Vera Jourová opened the first ever stocktaking conference on the application of Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Congress Secretary General Andreas Kiefer presented the Congress contribution in the field of training and awareness raising on

human rights among politicians and staff in municipalities, cities and regions and presented the respective Congress reports.

The Congress is convinced that good local and regional governance implies full compliance with fundamental liberties and human rights. Since several years, the Congress intensified its action in this respect. During its monitoring visits, the Congress is able to identify good practices in terms of respect of human rights at the local and regional level and began to include information of this issue in its reports.

So as to identify common or recurrent problems, the Congress also plans to prepare a report every five years, with an analysis of good practice about human rights in all member states. It has already developed indicators to assess the situation of human rights at the local level, including civil, economic and social rights. The Congress organizes an international conference in May in Graz and it is currently developing an action plan on raising awareness of local authorities in human rights.

Since 2010, the Congress collected data and examples of good practices of human rights implementation at local and regional level. This work is conducted through its members, partners (associations of local authorities, international organizations) and contacts with national authorities in the 47 member states.

In order to identify common and recurring issues, the Congress intends to prepare a report every five years which would include an analysis of good practices on the situation of human rights in all member states. It has already prepared indicators to assess the situation of human rights at local level including civic, political, economic and social rights and to raise awareness among local and regional authorities on human rights issues in the field. It will co-organise on 28 and 29 May an international conference in Graz and is currently working on the setting up of an action plan on awareness raising of local authorities on human rights.

D. EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Presentation of the Congress's work on gender equality (Strasbourg, 10 February 2015)

On the occasion of the visit by Danielle Bousquet, President of the French Gender Equality Council, the Secretary General of the Congress gave a presentation on the Congress's work in this area. In particular he highlighted the Congress's active commitment to combating violence against women and outlined current initiatives in the gender equality field. He presented three reports to be debated in 2015 on the participation of women in local and regional public life, the responsibility of local and regional authorities in combating the feminisation of poverty, and gender budgeting at local and regional level.

Women Mayors' Summit (Istanbul, 28 March 2015)

Barbara Toce (Italy, SOC) Vice-President of the Congress and Mayor of Pedaso, participated in the Women Mayors' Summit organized by the municipality of Avcilar (Turkey). She underlined, in particular, the necessity to encourage women to run for office and to stand for elections, to develop women's networks, and to set quotas.

She also reminded the situation of women in Kobané and the terrorist acts of the ISIS group against them.

During the Summit, the idea of creating a "Parliament" of women mayors was emitted so as to gather them each year to continue this work and exchange of good practices in the field of gender equality. Thus, the next Summit should be held in Kavala, Greece.

E. THE EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK

Summary of the ELDW 2014

The eighth edition of the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) officially took place between 13 and 19 October 2014; it was dedicated to the main theme of "Participatory democracy: sharing, proposing, deciding", with a special focus on youth. In total, 175 partners from 24 countries had reported their participation in the 2014 ELDW and organised approximately 480 activities, most of which can be seen on the ELDW website managed by the Congress Secretariat. 15 partners chose the "12 Stars" status, hence giving special prominence to their participation in this pan-European

initiative. Thus, the spirit of the ELDW reached around 30 million inhabitants – a much higher public than in previous years. The Russian Federation has shown the strongest commitment with reportedly over 100 local and regional authorities and their institutions participating in the ELDW. Partner cities of Russia, Turkey, Sweden, Poland and Belgium have organised the largest variety of activities, such as expositions, school competitions, public debates, theatre shows and citizen surveys. The involvement of local schools and disabled people in the implementation of the ELDW and the organisation of inter-municipal co-operation meetings on the occasion of the Democracy Week appeared on the agenda of many participants.

The “12 Star” special status was chosen in 2014 by: Amadora (Portugal), the Association of the City and the Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region (Belgium), Büyükçekmece (Turkey), Bydgoszcz (Poland), Chania (Greece), Dionysos (Greece), Junta de Andalucía (Spain), Karşıyaka (Turkey), Katowice (Poland), Ortahisar (Turkey), Örebro (Sweden), Reggio Calabria (Italy), Stockton on Tees Borough Council (United Kingdom), Sultanbeyli (Turkey), and Sundbyberg (Sweden).

The 2014 edition is also marked by the complete renewal of the visual identity and the official website of the ELDW.

General co-ordination meeting of the ELDW

In 2015, the annual co-ordination meeting of the ELDW was held in Paris, on 16 February, with the participation of mayors, deputy-mayors, presidents of associations and local co-ordinators of the project. The assessment of last year’s edition, the presentation of good practices, the discussion on the main theme for 2015 and the certification award ceremony for “12 Stars” were the main points on the agenda. The Congress was represented by Gaye Doganoglu (EPP/CCE, Turkey), who chaired the meeting in her role as Vice-President of the Congress and political Co-ordinator of the ELDW.

The 2015 edition of the ELDW

Taking up the proposal which was generated at the 2015 general co-ordination meeting of the ELDW, the theme “Living together in multicultural societies: respect, dialogue, interaction” was adopted by the Bureau during the 28th Session of the Congress (Strasbourg, 23-26 March 2015). The main reason of choosing this topic was to reflect upon recent events, in particular the terrorist attacks of January 2015 in Paris and several other European cities and beyond, as well as the threat they pose to common European values. The new slogan is part of the key theme for 2015 Congress activities devoted to local responses to human rights challenges and will offer the opportunity to promote relevant Congress initiatives, such as the future strategy to combat radicalisation at grass-roots level. 2015 will also mark the 30th anniversary of the opening for signature of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, today ratified by all Council of Europe member states, which will be unequivocally echoed in this year’s edition of the ELDW.

As for the short-term improvement of the project, several actions are foreseen, such as: making available online basic information on the ELDW in the official languages of the 47 Council of Europe member states; systematically promoting the ELDW at relevant international conferences using the recently produced general leaflets; intensifying relationships with the national co-ordinators of the ELDW, i.e. the associations of local and regional authorities; regularly informing institutional interlocutors and Congress members about latest developments on the project by means of newsletters, e-mail alerts and information on the website.

ELDW co-operation with institutional partners

The Secretariat of the Congress, responsible for the co-ordination of the ELDW initiative, has been – and will certainly continue – to work together with several institutional partners, most importantly the Council of Europe’s Department of Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (EDC/HRE), the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG), the No Hate Speech Campaign, the Conference of the INGOs, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) and the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE). The 2015 theme of multiculturalism will help create synergies with other Council of Europe activities, for example the fourth World Forum for Democracy, the Intercultural Cities Programme and the Europe Prize.

F. ROMA INCLUSION

On 17 February the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion in cooperation with the city of Malaga hosted a national seminar in Spain on the topic of access to European funds. Among the participants were representatives of all Spanish regions, the cities of Madrid, Barcelona, Alicante & Malaga.

The two main points on the agenda were firstly a presentation by experts of the European Commission and secondly a best practice sharing session between the attendees. Experts of the European Commission explained the process on how to apply for European funds to realize projects for Roma inclusion with the help of these funds.

The second session offered the participants a platform for the sharing of good practices, in order to benefit from the experience of others.

On 19 March the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR), an initiative of UNESCO, organized a roundtable event on "Fighting Racism and Discrimination: History, Memory and Contemporary Challenges". Part of the roundtable discussion was a panel on proven practices to combat discrimination. The European Alliance for Roma Inclusion was represented by experts from the cities of Stockholm, Graz and Jyväskylä, to share knowledge and good practices to fight anti-gypsyism with the participants. The representatives of the Alliance also took this opportunity to discuss future cooperation with them.

The Alliance welcomed 5 new participants among its group of committed and experienced cities and regions for the inclusion of Roma: Megara (Greece), Anderlecht (Belgium), Daugavpils (Latvia), Tivat (Montenegro) and Jelgava (Latvia). The Greek city of Megara has set up a "Support center for Roma and Vulnerable Groups", Anderlecht, one of the biggest Belgian cities, works with a local action plan on the inclusion of Roma since 2011, Daugavpils, the second biggest city in Latvia, focuses especially on establishing equal opportunities for all children in local schools, Tivat on the coast in Montenegro, has signed a memorandum of understanding with neighboring villages and UNICEF to create a comprehensive approach to the inclusion of minorities.

These accessions drive the number of Alliance participants up to 128, which shows effectively the need and feeling of urgency of European cities and regions to favor the inclusion of Roma.

G PREVENTING CORRUPTION

On 15-16 December 2014 the Congress organised in Paris an exploratory meeting of an experts group on promoting public ethics and preventing corruption at local and regional level. The aim of the meeting was to get an overall picture of existing instruments in the field of preventing corruption and to propose initiatives for promoting public ethics / preventing corruption at local and regional level. Representatives of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), ANTICOR (France), the Department of Political Science and Public Administration of the University of Murcia (Spain), the Institute of Industrial Psychology of the University of Tallinn (Estonia), Transparency International and the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform took part in the meeting.

The participants identified possible actions at local and regional level such as: co-operation initiatives with national governments and involving civil society, developing leadership programmes, promoting pilot projects and good examples with the support of benchmarking tools and updating existing instruments, in particular the European Code of conduct for the political integrity of local and regional elected representatives.

A second meeting of the group of experts was held in Paris, on 16-17 February 2015 under the presidency of Herwig van Staa, outgoing Congress President and thematic rapporteur on this issue. The experts reaffirmed that corruption is a major problem in Europe but it is not tackled as seriously as it should be, especially as concerns the local and regional levels. The real advantage of the Congress in this respect is its potential to problem solving via preventive actions at the grassroots level. The participants were particularly satisfied with the Code of conduct for the political integrity of local and regional elected representatives and suggested to keep it as a reference document, after possibly updating it, and take actions for its further promotion. This could be done especially during

the pre-electoral missions of the Congress by encouraging election candidates to sign the Congress Code of conduct for integrity.

Horizontal synergies within the intergovernmental sector of the Council of Europe can be produced by reinforcing cooperation between the Congress and the enlarged agreement Group of States against corruption (GRECO). Best practices at the grassroots level could be identified and promoted using the evaluation rounds and contacts of GRECO. Furthermore, the legal scope of the Council of Europe Anti-Corruption Action Plan could be enlarged, in order to develop GRECO's monitoring activities at local and regional level. The Congress, together with the Centre of Expertise on local self-government, would then be able to work very closely on the implementation of GRECO recommendations.

The Governance Committee of the Congress will be entrusted with the preparation of a report on promoting public ethics and preventing corruption at local and regional level for concretely implementing these ideas and initiatives.

VII. CO-OPERATION ACTIVITIES AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

A. EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

The Committee of the Regions of the European Union

The Vice-President of the Congress, Gaye Doganoglu (Turkey, EPP/CCE), took part in the 6th Plenary Session of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) held on 14-15 December 2014 in Antalya, Turkey. Which dealt with the problems afflicting the Mediterranean region, in particular those with which are confronted local and regional authorities in the field of human rights (refugees, asylum seekers and migrants).

On 12 February 2015 the Secretary General took part in the Plenary Session of the Committee of the Regions, where Markku Markkula (Finland) was elected President. It was a constitutive session for the renewal of the members and of their functions for two and a half year mandates.

On 24 February 2015 the Secretary General took part in the meeting of the Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX), held in Brussels and met the new Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions, Jiří Buriánek, for a bilateral meeting with the aim to establish the basis for future cooperation between the Congress and the CoR.

On 23 March 2015 the Congress organised in Strasbourg a meeting on co-operation activities on local governance in the Eastern Partnership countries, which included presentations by the Congress, the Directorate General of Programmes and the Democratic Institutions and Governance Department of the Council of Europe. The meeting was aimed also at supporting the work of the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) where 16 Congress members have a seat.

European Associations of local and regional authorities

The Congress committed itself to reinforcing its cooperation with the organisations representing the regions with a view to join forces and implement initiatives in favour of regional democracy.

From 20 to 22 February 2015, Vice-President of the Congress Barbara Toce (Italy, SOC), represented the Congress in the Steering Committee for launching the project "Local Authorities as Drivers for Development Education and Raising Awareness" (LADDER) organised by the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA). The Congress obtained the status of associate member to the project and Vice-President Toce indicated possible paths for action of the LADDER project (in particular cooperation with Northern African local and regional authorities) proposing to make full use of the European Charter of Local Self-government.

Concerning the cooperation with the AER, the Congress participated on 26-28 February 2015 in Vienna, to the AER Conference on "Independent Living and Political Participation", by a contribution of Josef Neumann (Germany, SOC), Congress Rapporteur on people with disabilities.

B. CO-OPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS

Albania

As part of the Council of Europe project entitled “Strengthening local government structures and co-operation of local elected representatives”, the Congress is carrying out activities to foster the establishment of a common platform for dialogue and co-operation between local and regional elected representatives. This project will run until the end of 2015 and comes under the Council of Europe co-operation document for Albania launched in November 2012. It is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation. The overall budget is €1 480 000, including €560 000 for Congress activities.

The Congress has continued the process of mediation between local elected representatives from the two main political alliances. To find a way out of the political deadlock between the ruling majority and the opposition parties, in particular concerning the ongoing reform of territorial administration, the Congress has developed new activities in close co-operation with the associations of local and regional authorities. These activities seek to promote and support the dialogue between local authorities concerning revision of the legislation on decentralisation and issues of common concern, in particular with a view to the taking up of office, after the June 2015 local elections, by the elected representatives of the new municipalities based on the territorial reform. These proposals were approved by all the project partners and the donor at the third meeting of the steering committee held in Tirana on 15 January 2015 in the presence of the Vice-President of the Congress, John Warmisham (United Kingdom, SOC) and the Secretary General, Andreas Kiefer.

The country’s four associations of local and regional authorities jointly held pluralist regional meetings in Shkodra, Fieri, Kamza and Elbasan on 20, 23, 25 and 27 March 2015 respectively, attended by some 150 elected representatives and local administration representatives. At these meetings, the local elected representatives made proposals concerning the new legislative framework for local and regional authorities and local governance, as well as the national decentralisation strategy. These recommendations were consolidated at a national round table held in Tirana on 1 April 2015 and will be forwarded to the government, parliament and international organisations active in the area of local governance.

Armenia

The Congress is currently implementing two projects under the Action Plan for Armenia for 2012-2014:

- Armenia.1- Exchange of good practices to improve local governance

The Council of Europe is implementing the “Support to Consolidating Local Democracy in Armenia” project, which is funded by the Danish government and includes three lines of action. The line of action being implemented by the Congress involves building the leadership capacity of local elected representatives with the broader aim of increasing their know-how and good practices in the field of local democracy so as to improve local political governance in the country and enable the local government reform to be carried out successfully.

The project began on 1 October 2013 and this component will run until the end of September 2015. The overall budget is €1 785 000, including €575 000 for Congress activities.

A series of workshops have been held under the leadership programme for mayors. At the fifth workshop, which was held in Yerevan on 21 and 22 January 2015, the group of Armenian mayors discussed how the values shared by a community can influence the behaviour of its members, and how these values can also contribute to the development of the community and should be taken into account. The mayors learned how they can use their influence and leadership to shape these values and promote positive and socially productive behaviour.

At the sixth and final workshop, held in Yerevan on 4 March 2015, the mayors presented and analysed their municipal development plans with their peers, drawing on the skills and know-how acquired at the previous workshops. They also assessed the leadership programme as a whole using the World Cafe method. Their feedback was positive and they highlighted the usefulness of the issues addressed and the possibility of exchanging views with their counterparts from Armenia and other European countries. They also underlined the personal development aspects which they had been able to put into practice in performing their duties.

Moreover, following the call for projects submitted to them, four authorities were selected to receive more targeted assistance with implementing pilot citizen participation initiatives.

Under this project, on 21 January 2015, the three Armenian associations dealing with local self-government issues, which represent local authorities, councillors and local finance officials, publicly handed over to the government a document compiling the ideas and suggestions put forward by the local elected representatives who took part in the two regional seminars held in Gyumri and Sisian on 9 and 11 September 2014. The document analyses a number of weaknesses in the local governance system in Armenia, as well as measures and policies that could help improve the situation.

A second series of regional seminars will look into the issues of participatory democracy and implementation at local level of the legislation passed in June 2013. It will also provide an opportunity for presenting to a wide range of mayors and municipal councillors the pilot citizen participation initiatives and the added value of investing in participatory practices.

The steering committee held its second meeting in Yerevan on 20 January. The activities carried out in 2014 were presented and those for 2015 were approved.

Congress members Knud Andersen (Denmark, ILDG), Matej Gombosi (Slovenia, EPP/CCE), Nigel Mermagen (United Kingdom, ILDG), Artan Shkempi (Albania, SOC), Tracey Simpson-Laing (United Kingdom, SOC) and Barbara Toce (Italy, SOC) took part in these activities.

- Armenia 2 - Institutional support to the Communities Association

The second Congress project in Armenia is co-funded by the Swiss government. It provides "Institutional support to the Communities Association of Armenia" and is part of a broader four-year programme aimed at improving the system of local governance in Armenia run by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (DDC), in partnership with the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the Armenian Social Investment Fund and the Council of Europe.

The budget for the Congress activities totals €824 625, with DDC co-funding of €674 000. The project started in November 2014 and will run until April 2017.

The project seeks to boost the capacity of the Communities Association of Armenia and make it a key player in the country's system of governance and an active defender of the interests of local authorities. The activities are aimed at making the association more effective and improving its ability to meet its members' needs, while mobilising them with a single voice. This involves the adoption of an organisational development strategy by the members and strengthening of the association's system of internal governance. A further aim is to improve communication between the various members of the association and ensure transparent and efficient financial management.

A workshop on the role of associations of local authorities was held in Yerevan on 18 and 19 February 2015 to start the project activities. The aim was to build on the experience of other European associations and inspire institutional reforms within the Armenian association. The workshop brought together 45 members of the Communities Association of Armenia, including mayors and members of the association's decision-making bodies. With their peers from other associations in Denmark, Finland, Georgia and Latvia and Congress members Lotte Cederskjold (Denmark, SOC), Juliana Hoxha (Albania, SOC) and Andris Jaunsleinis (Latvia, ILDG), they discussed the means and steps necessary for the organisational development of the association to make it a vital player in the local self-government reforms in Armenia.

Lastly, the association's board met on 10 March 2015. The members discussed and approved the work plan for the project activities and the specifications for the review to be started in March 2015. A group of members were selected as representatives of the association to contribute more specifically to the project.

EU/CoE co-operation framework for the Eastern Partnership (2015-2017)

On 18 December 2014, the Council of Europe and the European Commission signed a new co-operation agreement for the Eastern Partnership for the period from 2015 to 2017, the countries covered being Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, as well as Belarus.

Under the theme of the programme for promoting democratic governance, a project to strengthen the institutional framework for local governance has been developed by the Congress and the Directorate General of Democracy's Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform.

The aim of the programme is to support local self-government reform processes, promote more efficient, transparent and ethical governance at local level in at least three of the beneficiary countries and support improvements in the management of human and financial resources in local authorities. The target groups of the Congress activities are local elected representatives, their associations and civil society.

The three-year project started in January 2015, with a budget of €1 285 000 for the Congress component. It is being implemented jointly with a dedicated team based in Chisinau (Moldova), which is partly shared with the Directorate General of Democracy. The project team was recruited this year and has been in place since March. The initial expert meetings are due to be held in mid-April 2015, at the same time as the steering committee comprising the ministers responsible for local and regional government and the heads of the Congress delegations from the beneficiary countries.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Agenda of the 28th Session of the Congress (24-26 March 2015)

CG/2015(28)OJ1PROV

Strasbourg, Palais de l'Europe

24-26 March 2015

Theme for 2015: Local Responses to Human Rights Challenges – Migration, Discrimination, Social inclusion

Tuesday 24 March 2015

Committee meetings

8.30 – 10.45

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

Tuesday 24 March 2015

11.00 – 13.00, Hemicycle

Plenary Sitting

Opening of the 28th Session of the Congress by the President of the Congress
Jean-Claude FRECON

Verification of new members' credentials

Presentation by the rapporteurs:
Gaye DOĞANOĞLU, Turkey (L, EPP/CEE) and Leen VERBEEK, Netherlands (R, SOC)



Debate and vote on the draft resolution [CG/2015(28)2]
Deadline for tabling amendments: 16.00 Monday 23 March

Adoption of the draft agenda of the session
[CG/2015(28)OJ1PROV]

Adoption of the draft minutes of the last sitting of the 27th Session (16 October 2014)
[CG/2014(27)PV3]

Adoption of the composition of the Congress committees
[CG/2015(28)3]

Election of the [Secretary General](#) of the Congress
[in the hemicycle antechamber]

Voting will close at 13.00

Communication by the President of the Congress

Debate

**Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe
(November 2014 – May 2015)**

Statement by Isabelle WEYKMANS, Deputy-Minister-President, Minister of Culture, Employment and Tourism of the Belgian German-speaking Community, representing the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers

Oral reply to written questions [CG/2015(28)4]

Deadline for tabling written questions: 16.00 Monday 23 March

Suspension of the sitting

13.00 *EVENT: Inauguration of an exhibition on “An alternative way to commemorate the Great War” followed by a reception offered by the authorities of Wallonia and Flanders, on the occasion of the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe*

In the lobby of the hemicycle

Tuesday 24 March 2015

14.30 – 19.30 Hemicycle

Plenary Sitting

The budget and resources of the Congress for the next biennium (2016-2017)

Presentation by the rapporteurs:

Clemens LAMMERSKITTEN, Germany (R, EPP/CCE) and Barbara TOCE, Italy (L, SOC)

Debate and vote on the draft recommendation [[CG/2015\(28\)13PROV](#)]

Deadline for tabling amendments: 16.00 Monday 23 March



The United Kingdom : prospects for devolution

Statements by:

The Right Honourable The Lord AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government, UK Government

The Right Honourable The Lord WALLACE OF TANKERNESS PC QC, Advocate General for Scotland, UK Government

Christina McKELVIE, Member of the Scottish Parliament, Convenor of the Scottish Parliament's European and External Relations Committee

David SPARKS, Chairman of the Local Government Association of England and Wales, and Councillor, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Debate

Local and regional authorities facing migration flows

Statements by:

Tuncer BAKIRHAN, Co-President of GABB (Union of Southeastern Anatolia Region Municipalities) and Co-Mayor of Siirt Municipality, Turkey

Giuseppina Maria NICOLINI, Mayor of Lampedusa, Italy

Natacha BOUCHART, Mayor of Calais, France

Cardinal Francesco MONTENEGRO, Archbishop of Agrigento, Representative of the Holy See

Thorsten KLUTE, Secretary of State, Ministry of Labour, Integration and Social Affairs of North Rhine Westphalia, Germany

Debate

Suspension of the sitting

Diversity Advantage Challenge Award Ceremony

Resumption of the sitting

Electoral lists and voters residing *de facto* abroad

Presentation by the rapporteur: Jos WIENEN, Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE)

Debate and vote on the draft resolution and draft recommendation [[CG/2015\(28\)6PROV](#)]

Deadline for tabling amendments: 16.00 Monday 23 March



End of the sitting

19.30 EVENT: *Reception hosted by the United Kingdom Delegation to the Council of Europe – Devolution and stronger local democracy*

In the lobby of the hemicycle

Wednesday 25 March 2015

Chamber of Regions

8.30 - 12.00, Hemicycle

Opening by the President of the Chamber

Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM

Adoption of the draft agenda of the Chamber

[CPR/2015(28)OJ1PROV]

The regional dimension of the process of decentralisation in Ukraine

Statements by:

Vyacheslav NEHODA, Vice-Minister, Ministry of regional Development of Ukraine

Gianni BUQUICCHIO, President, Venice Commission of the Council of Europe

Oleksii HONCHARENKO, Representative, Ukrainian Parliament

Sergiy CHERNOV, Chairman of the Kharkiv Regional Council, President of the Ukrainian Association of District and Regional Councils (tbc)

Nataliya ROMANOVA, Councillor of Chernigiv District Council, Vice-President of the Congress

Debate

Scotland after the 18 September 2014 referendum

Statements by:

The Right Honourable The Lord WALLACE OF TANKERNESS PC QC, Advocate General for Scotland, UK Government

Christina MCKELVIE, Member of the Scottish Parliament, Convenor of the Scottish Parliament's European and External Relations Committee

Harry MCGUIGAN, Councillor of North Lanarkshire Council, Spokesperson for "Community Wellbeing" of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA)

Debate

<p>Communication by the President of the Chamber [CPR/2015(28)2] [CPR/2015(28)1]</p>
<p>Close by the President of the Chamber</p>
<p><i>At the end of the sitting</i></p> <p>EVENT: Reception to inaugurate an exhibition on the culture, folklore and tourism of Adjara, Georgia</p> <p><i>In the lobby of the hemicycle</i></p>

Wednesday 25 March 2015

Chamber of Local Authorities

9.00 - 12.30, Room 1

<p>Opening by the President of the Chamber Anders KNAPE</p>
<p>Adoption of the draft agenda of the Chamber [CPL/2015(28)OJ1PROV]</p>
<p>Communication by the President of the Chamber [CPL/2015(28)1]</p>
<p>Jewish cemeteries, the responsibility of local authorities Presentation by the rapporteur: John WARMISHAM, United Kingdom (L, SOC) Statements by: Mendel SAMAMA, Rabbi of Strasbourg, France Abraham GINSBERG, Executive Director of the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe (CPJCE) Roland RIES, Mayor of Strasbourg, France Yossi BEILIN, former Justice Minister, Israel Debate and vote on the draft resolution [CPL/2015(28)2PROV] <i>Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Tuesday 24 March</i></p>
<p>Urgent debate: cities and towns against terrorism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal threats to Europe's towns and cities Statement by: Guilherme PINTO, President of the European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS) Debate• External threats: the example of Kobane Statement by: Mustapha ABDI, Mayor of Kobane, Syria Debate
<p>Close by the President of the Chamber</p>

At the end of the sitting

EVENT: Reception to inaugurate an exhibition on the culture, folklore and tourism of Adjara, Georgia

In the lobby of the hemicycle

Wednesday 25 March 2015

14.30 – 19.00, Hemicycle

Plenary Sitting

Adoption of the draft minutes of the sittings of the Congress on 24 March 2015

[CG/2015(28)PV1am] [CG/2015(28)PV1pm]

Presentation of the no hate speech campaign

Gabriella BATTAINI-DRAGONI, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Guaranteeing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people's rights: a responsibility for Europe's towns and regions

Presentation by the rapporteur: Yoomi RENSTRÖM, Sweden (R, SOC)

Statement by:

Florencio CHICOTE, Coordinator of the Berlin Action Plan against Homophobia and Transphobia within the Berlin Antidiscrimination Office, Germany

Debate and vote on the draft resolution and draft recommendation [\[CG/2015\(28\)9PROV\]](#)

Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Tuesday 24 March



Urgent debate: responses to radicalisation in Europe's cities and regions: fighting terrorism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and hate speech

Rapporteur: Leen VERBEEK, Netherlands (R, SOC)

Presentation by Gunn Marit HELGESEN, Norway (R, EPP/CCE)

Statements by:

Hugh STARKEY, Professor of Citizenship and Human Rights Education, University College of London, United Kingdom

Philippe GAUDIN, Head of Training and Research at the European Institute of Religious Studies, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, France

Hans BONTE, Mayor of Vilvoorde, Belgium

Moussa AL-HASSAN DIAW, expert on extremism and deradicalisation, University College of Education Linz (Austria), EUISA Network/RAN Europe and Network for deradicalisation and prevention in Austria and Germany

Debate and vote on the draft resolution and draft recommendation [\[CG/2015\(28\)14PROV\]](#)

Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Tuesday 24 March



Local and regional democracy in Greece

Presentation by the rapporteurs:

Artur TORRES PEREIRA, Portugal (L, EPP/CCE) and Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM, Austria (R, SOC)



Debate and vote on the draft recommendation [CG/2015(28)8PROV]

Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Tuesday 24 March

End of the sitting

19.30 *EVENT: Reception offered by the City of Strasbourg, at the Hôtel de Ville, Place Broglie.*

Thursday 26 March 2015

Bureau meeting

8.30 - 9.15, Room Bureau of the Congress
8

Thursday 26 March 2015

9.30 - 12.30, Hemicycle

Plenary Sitting

Formal adoption of texts approved by the chambers

[CG/2015(28)10]

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

on 25 March 2015 [CG/2015(28)PV2], [CPL/2015(28)PV1] and [CPR/2015(28)PV1]

Local and regional democracy in Poland



Presentation by the rapporteurs: Jakob (Jos) WIENEN, Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE) and Cynthia HUGHES, United Kingdom (R, SOC)

Debate and vote on the draft recommendation [[CG/2015\(28\)12PROV](#)]

Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Wednesday 25 March

Statement by Stanisław HUSKOWSKI, State Secretary at the Ministry of Administration and Digitization, Poland

Oral reply to written questions [CG/2015(28)20]

Deadline for tabling written questions: 10.00 Wednesday 25 March

Local and regional democracy in Norway

Presentation by the rapporteurs:

Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC) and Guilherme PINTO, Portugal (R, SOC)



Debate and vote on the draft recommendation [[CG/2015\(28\)5PROV](#)]

Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Wednesday 25 March

Statement by Jardar JENSEN, State Secretary of Local Government and Modernisation, Norway

Oral reply to written questions [CG/2015(28)16]

Deadline for tabling written questions: 10.00 Wednesday 25 March

Criteria for standing in local and regional elections

Presentation by the rapporteurs :



Oleksii HONCHARENKO, Ukraine (R, SOC) and Viacheslav ROGOV, Russian Federation (ILDG)

Debate and vote on the draft resolution and draft recommendation [[CG/2015\(28\)7PROV](#)]

Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Wednesday 25 March

Close of the 28th Session by the President of the Congress

Appendix 2: Resolution 381 (2015) on Combatting radicalisation at grassroots level: the role of local and regional authorities

28th SESSION

Strasbourg, 24-26 March 2015

1. The recent attacks in European and other cities have brought home once again the fact that terrorism is still a threat to peace and security, undermining democracy and its institutions and the fundamental values defended by the Council of Europe. Among the responses being developed from the Council of Europe perspective, the prevention of radicalisation is one of the most relevant components to the Congress' work and one which provides scope for local and regional authorities to act.

2. The Congress has been working for the last two decades on subjects aiming at establishing inclusive and resilient communities as a protective shield and element to prevent and fight radicalisation at local and regional level. In this context, it has produced recommendations on tackling terrorism, the integration and participation of people of immigrant origin, intercultural and interfaith dialogue as well as resolutions on urban crime prevention, on the fight against racism at local and regional level and on education for democratic citizenship.

3. Responding to the invitation from the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to contribute to the Council of Europe effort in this field and guided by relevant Congress texts, the Congress Bureau adopted, on 2 February 2015, a "Strategy to combat radicalisation at grassroots level" which proposes a series of activities to be carried out in the short, medium and long term at local and regional level, based on three pillars of action, namely awareness raising, synergies with Council of Europe bodies and synergies with other institutions.

4. The Congress supports the approach put forward by the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly in its resolution on the terrorist attacks in Paris adopted in January 2015, which proposes a concerted, democratic and measured response from all levels of governance to radicalisation leading to terrorism. The Congress also takes note of the statement made by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe to the effect that policies which respect human rights undermine support for radicalism among potential recruits and increase public trust in the rule of law.

5. In the light of the above, the Congress commits itself to:

a. compiling and updating the relevant texts of the Council of Europe and the Congress which promote citizen participation, living together in diversity, social inclusion and cohesion, intercultural and interfaith dialogue, in particular the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

b. establishing guidelines for local and regional authorities on preventing radicalisation and manifestations of hate at grass-roots level, to be adopted at its 29th Session in October 2015, based on the present resolution;

c. creating a pedagogical toolkit for use by local elected representatives when organising intercultural and inter-faith activities;

d. developing training modules on human rights issues tailor-made for the needs of local and regional elected representatives and to make the Human Rights Forum, the first of which will take place in Graz on 28 and 29 May 2015, an annual or biennial targeted event, organised in co-operation with cities, regions and relevant institutions;

e. building on existing co-operation established with relevant networks such as the European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS) and the European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR);

f. drawing up a roadmap to carry out the Congress strategy in 2015-2016, ensuring the allocation of sufficient financial resources for its implementation in collaboration with possible partners, including a pilot phase and assessment scheduled for the end of 2015 and evaluation of the strategy's implementation in 2016.

6. The Congress invites the local and regional authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe to:

a. actively participate in concerted national action against extremism and radicalisation including the drawing up, preparation and implementation of relevant policies in the prevention of and the fight against terrorism;

b. consider drawing up and implementing urban policies to combat radicalisation addressing both urban development and security issues, taking inspiration from Congress Resolution 205 (2005) on cultural identity in peripheral urban areas and Resolution 57 (1997) on crime and urban insecurity in Europe;

c. engage, through their associations of local and regional authorities, with primary and secondary schools in order to foster citizenship education through curricular and extracurricular activities including mentoring programmes, taking into account Congress Resolution 332 (2011) on “Education for democratic citizenship: tools for cities” and by investing in youth (civil) service;

d. develop a specific strategy concerning youth and to involve young people systematically in the work of the cities and regions to fight discrimination, exclusion and to promote dialogue, tolerance and freedom of expression, online and offline, notably via the social media, drawing on Congress Resolution 346 (2012) on the changing face of youth political engagement and the Council of Europe campaign on No Hate Speech;

e. organise events fostering intercultural and inter-faith dialogue and better relations between community groups, for example in the framework of the Congress' European Local Democracy Week, taking into account Congress Resolution 323 (2011) on meeting the challenge of inter-faith and intercultural tensions at local level and to meet regularly with local religious leaders, taking inspiration from the Council of Europe Annual Exchange on the Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue;

f. develop projects involving disadvantaged neighbourhoods and detention centres under local authority responsibility, and ensure that humanitarian, social and security consequences of social segregation and institutional discrimination are an integral part of said projects;

g. encourage social cohesion and inclusion through local initiatives such as neighbourhood councils or foreign residents' councils and co-operate closely with civil society organisations in order to tackle manifestations of social exclusion, discrimination and racism with particular attention to disadvantaged groups, and to transform the challenge of living together in diversity into an advantage for the entire community, taking into account Congress Resolution 375 (2014) on “Promoting diversity through intercultural education and communication strategies”;

h. define and introduce policies to protect and enhance the value of the cultural heritage of different social groups through citizen participation, drawing on the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CETS No. 199, the “Faro Convention”);

i. encourage cities to develop policies against terrorist attacks while ensuring that such policies do not infringe upon citizens' fundamental rights nor hinder in any way the democratic agenda for social inclusion and cohesion.

j. share their experiences in existing or yet to be created networks in order to ensure the best possible dissemination of good practices.

Appendix 3: Bureau declaration on the Kobane corridor

CG/BUR/2015(28)5

26 March/mars 2015

The Bureau of the Congress,

1. draws attention to the recent events in the city of Kobane and its fight against extremism. The Bureau of the Congress deplors the devastation of the Kobane area and the very difficult situation of the population, which currently has no access to electricity, water supply and sanitation, nor to sufficient food or other every day basic services. It underlines the enormous tasks facing the local government administration with respect to the protection of population, in terms of health and safety as well as the clean-up and reconstruction of the city;
2. wishes to express its solidarity and support with the population and local government administration of Kobane as well as with the other cities in the region which have been and continue to be victims of extremism, and stresses the need for support from the international community;
3. acknowledges the important role that Turkey, as a member State of the Council of Europe and a neighbour of Syria, has played and continues to play in providing shelter to numerous Syrian refugees on Turkish territory and in providing humanitarian aid to the Syrian population, in particular through various corridors established along the border;
4. calls upon all member States and international partners to step up their support to UN agencies and to Syria's neighbouring countries by extending humanitarian assistance to the Syrian population and rising to the challenges posed by this huge humanitarian crisis;
5. supports the request for permanent humanitarian aid corridors along the border to enable access into the Kobane area;
6. calls therefore on the Turkish authorities to keep their border open with a permanent and safe corridor, and to allow free passage of all consignments of medicine and medical supplies as well as of essential foodstuffs, clothing and tonics for the civilian population, and to make free movement legally possible for the inhabitants of the region.

Appendix 4: Guidelines for co-operation activities in Council of Europe member States

CG/BUR/2015(27)31

23 March 2015

Improving the impact of Congress recommendations

Preamble

The Congress is the Council of Europe's assembly of local and regional representatives, a political and consultative body of territorial delegates who hold an elected mandate in their own country. Its core mission is to ensure the full application of democratic principles at local and regional levels both by national governments and by territorial authorities. To do so it has been mandated by the Committee of Ministers to "prepare on a regular basis country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all member states" as well as "reports and recommendations following the observation of local and/or regional elections"¹.

The Congress of local and regional authorities (the Congress) acts in priority fields of activity which have a substantial local and/or regional dimension. It is also a reference point for territorial democracy. Its members form a pool of practitioners in local and regional policy matters which constitutes an asset for the development and deepening of local and regional democracy and governance in the Council of Europe member States.

Context

In order to give a practical response to the challenges encountered at grassroots level, the Congress has adopted a new orientation since 2011 and developed new forms of co-operation and action directly linked with its statutory responsibilities².

The Congress is able to offer its expertise to help both national and territorial authorities in the implementation of its recommendations, one main objective being the strengthening of the competences and capacities of local and regional elected representatives and of the role of their associations with regard to the Council of Europe's priority fields of action.

Monitoring of the European Charter on Local Self-Government and observation of elections

The European Charter on Local Self-Government (CETS No. 122) -hereafter the Charter- is the cornerstone of local democracy in Europe and ratified by all Council of Europe member States. Compliance with its provisions is verified through the monitoring mechanism of the Congress³. In addition, the Congress carries out observations of local and regional elections so as to ensure the integrity of electoral processes at local and regional level and to promote, at the same time, public confidence and electoral participation⁴.

The coherence and effectiveness of the monitoring process is enhanced through a post-monitoring dialogue and that of the observation of elections through a post-election dialogue with the national authorities concerned, with the aim of assisting and facilitating the better implementation of Congress recommendations. After an exchange of views and political meetings with the national authorities and relevant stakeholders of the country concerned, a roadmap is agreed upon and developed to set the pace of reforms. On the basis of the monitoring report and in the case of a post-monitoring dialogue, when a need is identified in collaboration with the central authorities and/or within the framework of a

¹ Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2011)2, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 19 January 2011

² Framework Document for Cooperation activities of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, approved by the Bureau of the Congress on 16 September 2011 and Priorities of the Congress 2013-2016

³ Resolution 307 (2010)REV 2, adopted by the Congress on 30 October 2013

⁴ Resolution 306(2010)REV, adopted by the Congress on 30 October 2013

Council of Europe Action Plan, co-operation programmes are designed and activities are implemented to address in a practical way the specific or transversal problems identified during monitoring and election observation activities⁵.

Thematic recommendations

The Congress Secretariat carries out co-operation activities in thematic fields such as: gender equality and participation of women in the political life, consultation of local authorities by national governments, promotion of public ethics and prevention of corruption, youth and civic engagement, regionalisation processes and territorial reforms, transfrontier cooperation, etc. These activities are based on the thematic reports and recommendations prepared by its Statutory Committees (Monitoring Committee, Current Affairs Committee and Governance Committee) and driven by the demand of the member states themselves.

The co-operation activities are carried out in accordance with the main international treaties and texts on local and regional democracy, and in particular:

- the European Charter of Local Self-Government (CETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right of citizens to participate in the conduct of public affairs (CETS No. 207);
- the Council of Europe Reference Framework for Regional Democracy (MCL16(2009)11);
- the European Code of Conduct for the Political Integrity of Local and Regional Elected Representatives⁶;
- the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life⁷;
- the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters of the European Commission on Democracy through Law -better known as the Venice Commission (CDL-AD(2002)023rev).

Reference texts comprise also other basic Council of Europe conventions which are of particular relevance for local and regional authorities, such as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (CETS No. 148), as well as relevant recommendations from the Committee of Ministers.

1. Aims of the Congress' intervention

Under the authority of the Secretary General, the Congress Secretariat implements programmes and activities related to the local democracy component of the Council of Europe Action Plans for specific member States as well as regional activities in the Eastern Partnership countries and in South East Europe with the aim of:

- supporting the implementation of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government;
- developing the competencies of local elected representatives (women and men) and their knowledge of good practices so as to enable them to assume full leadership and responsibility in their communities;
- enhancing the institutional capacity of local authorities and empowering them for the delivery of better services to their citizens;
- fostering regular dialogue (early and transparent) with the national authorities and promoting consultation among local and regional authorities, in particular through their associations and institutional mechanisms (properly anchored in policies and legislative framework), in order to improve the relevance and quality of the legislation, taking into account regional specificities, as provided by the Charter;
- increasing dialogue with citizens and involving them in local public life and decision making, by enabling local elected representatives (mayors and councillors) to use and implement new participatory measures.

⁵ Resolution 353(2013)REV, adopted by the Congress on 30 October 2013

⁶ Recommendation 60(99), adopted by the Congress on 17 June 1999

⁷ Recommendation 128(2003), adopted by the Congress on 21 May 2003

2. Methodology

The co-operation activities consist mainly of a series of peer-to-peer exchanges and interactive sessions with the participation of Congress members from other member states of the Council of Europe and experts. They are designed to be easily adaptable to specific target groups, relevant themes and local contexts. Creativity, motivation and openness of the target groups are an important feature of these activities. Specific attention is paid to political pluralism and inclusion of women.

Roundtables, seminars and workshops are conceived as an experience of mutual learning and sharing of know-how and knowledge.

The Congress Secretariat is fully involved in the preparation of Council of Europe Actions Plans, taking into account the monitoring reports and elections observations reports. Once approved by the Committee of Ministers, the programmes and projects are coordinated and financially supervised by the Office of the Directorate General of Programmes (ODG Prog), which reports to the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. The Congress Secretariat acts in close co-operation and synergy with the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform⁸ (Centre of Expertise) for the implementation of the local democracy component of the Action Plans.

2.1. Role of Congress members

Congress members are invited to take part in events to exchange views with the participants and provide peer advice to mayors and councillors on their daily experience of local democracy in their own countries.

The benefit for the participants in these co-operation activities is the opportunity to learn from similar experiences both from their own country and from their European neighbours. Congress members benefit from these exchanges too, as they strengthen and expand their network of peers throughout Europe.

The Congress members who participate in the activities should have the following profile:

- experience in key political roles in their respective local and regional authority;
- openness to mutual exchange of experiences and good practice;
- political and cultural sensitivity;
- relevant experience in the specific themes or fields of activities discussed during the event (e.g. decentralisation, municipal amalgamation, financial autonomy, etc);
- availability to travel and relevant language skills.

2.2. Contribution of local and international experts

Academics from the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government can provide relevant expertise on the Charter, on topical issues that have implications for local and regional authorities and on the situation of each member State, particularly on specific matters that pose a problem with regard to compliance with the Charter provisions. To design the content of the co-operation activities, international and local experts as well as trainers in the field of local and regional democracy are involved in designing the content of the co-operation activities.

In addition, since the number of co-operation activities and countries concerned is increasing, experts are recruited on an *ad-hoc* basis through a permanent call, to support activities on political governance at local and regional level, including the role, responsibilities and leadership of local elected representatives, communication, ethics and prevention of corruption in local public decision-making, involvement of citizens, etc.

The co-operation activities can also be implemented through partnerships and with the expertise of international networks of local and regional authorities such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) or the Assembly of European Regions (AER), as well as the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA), the Network of associations of Local Authorities in South-

⁸ The Centre of Expertise is a Unit of the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe Secretariat. It supports ministries in the implementation of local self-government reforms through legal assistance and capacity-building of administrations. Its Advisory Board includes representatives from the Congress, the European Committee on Democracy and Governance and the Directorate General of Democracy, which assess and approve the work programme of the Centre of Expertise before transmission for information to the Committee of Ministers.

East Europe (NALAS), and the European Network of Training Organisations for Local and Regional Authorities (ENTO).

2.3. Sources of funding and the Steering Committee

The co-operation programmes are generally funded by external voluntary contributions, coming from donor countries (including member States) as well as from the European Union or other international organisations. In addition, a contribution from the Congress ordinary budget may be provided for each project. Both the operational activities and the staff in the project teams are financed by extra-budgetary resources.

The operational project budgets are managed by ODG Prog, in accordance with the delegation by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to the field offices. The Congress Secretariat is responsible for ensuring the compliance with the rules and procedures, as well as for the content-related implementation of the activities and their supervision. It also manages the contributions from the Congress' ordinary budget.

A project team is recruited for the implementation of each project. A minor part of the team is located in the headquarters of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg (mostly responsible for the preparation and coordination of the activities) and a major part in the field offices (mostly responsible for the organisation and practical implementation of the activities).

A Steering Committee is composed of relevant stakeholders (i.e. representatives of the Congress and/or its Secretariat and of the Council of Europe Secretariat, local authorities and their associations, representatives from the national authorities, donors, etc.). It is, in most cases, established at the beginning of each co-operation project and meets once a year. The Steering Committee provides strategic guidance, assesses the progress made during the implementation of activities and approves yearly plans of activities. It also ensures proper co-ordination between the different parts of the project implemented respectively by the Congress Secretariat and the Centre of Expertise.

3. Themes of the activities

The Congress Secretariat has specifically designed tailor-made activities according to the different targets concerned and under relevant themes. The main objectives of the co-operation projects of the Congress can be classified as follows:

3.1. Fostering dialogue between regional/local authorities and central authorities; building the capacities of the national associations of local/regional authorities

The Congress believes that strong local/regional government associations have an essential role to play in the development and implementation of local self-governance. Activities are therefore designed to facilitate the participation of local and regional authorities in framing national policies within a sustainable institutional framework and to institutionalise a sustainable and formal mechanism of dialogue.

These activities aim to ensure that the local governmental entities and their associations are regularly consulted and contribute to the process of drafting legislation on matters of their concern and relevant reforms, as well as with regard to their implementation, as provided by the Charter.

The Congress supports the creation of opportunities for local authorities to exchange among themselves and to find common positions, so as to increase their power of advocacy vis-à-vis the central institutions. It also provides support to associations in order to develop their institutional capacities and their structures so as to improve the level of services provided to their members.

The process has been conceived as an inclusive one, with representatives of ministries, members of Parliament, local governments associations, municipalities, international organisations, members of the Congress, and local and international experts taking part in it.

3.2. *Building the capacities of local and regional elected officials as promoters of change*

The Congress has devised a flexible programme for elected representatives, aimed at building their leadership capacities and their knowledge of the best practices and standards of local self-government.

Selected groups of mayors are given the possibility of exchanging experiences with Congress members from other Council of Europe member States, and to learn from international and local experts how to define and develop effective policies and lead successful projects that inspire citizens and stakeholders towards concrete and positive results. The role played by the Congress members is extremely valuable to these activities, as they provide similar practical experience and can discuss with the participants on an equal basis. In addition, local and international experts can provide in-depth knowledge of European standards on local and regional democracy and of relevant legislation and practices from European countries.

The flexibility of the programme, structured around a number of thematic workshops, means it can be adapted to the needs of the target group. Any of the following topics can be included:

- the role and responsibilities of local or regional elected representatives;
- ethics in politics and decision making;
- engaging citizen in decisionmaking at local level;
- designing and leading successful projects;
- effective communication;
- transfrontier and inter-regional co-operation;
- quality campaigns for local and regional elections;
- implementation of human rights at local level;
- decentralisation and regionalisation processes.

Furthermore, empowered elected representatives are instrumental in bringing larger groups of mayors and councillors on board in national and international activities, thereby enabling the impact of the programme to be scaled up.

3.3. *Making young local leaders aware of the principles of local democracy*

The Congress implements a series of regional seminars aimed at disseminating a culture of democracy beyond the present-day political sphere by raising awareness of local and regional democracy principles and developing the participants' capacity to engage in local elections in an active and informed manner. These seminars bring together leaders of NGOs, representatives of the youth wings of political parties and of the media, as well as local elected representatives (mayors and councillors) or candidates and informal leaders (bloggers, journalists) likely to stand for future local elections or to perform a role in the electoral process.

The seminars are designed according to a format which mixes formal presentations delivered by trainers or Congress members followed by open discussion and interactive group sessions. The participants are invited to share their perception of the role of local authorities and citizens and to come up with ideas on how to bring about democratic change in their communities.

3.4. *Local pilot initiatives*

The Congress Secretariat provides assistance to selected pilot communities to design and implement sustainable and replicable initiatives encouraging the active participation of citizens in decision making at local government level. The final objective is to incite local governments to become efficient, flexible, accountable and responsive to the needs of their communities.

Key interest groups in the communities receive support from international and local experts as well as individual coaching and are guided through the different preparation and implementation phases of their own citizen participation initiatives.

Practical experiences and participative models in pilot communities are then disseminated and shared with other communities through wider events that may also involve Congress members.

Conclusion

Based on the political work of the Congress and its statutory activities, the Congress Secretariat develops and implements co-operation projects at local and regional level. These activities are organised in the framework of bilateral or regional programmes, funded by voluntary contributions, and as part of the thematic priorities of the Congress.

This practical aspect of the Congress' work ensures a link between the political bodies of the Congress and the operational General Directorates of the Council of Europe Secretariat, in particular the Directorate General of Democracy and its Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform. The Congress activities are fully integrated in the overall action of the Council of Europe, on the basis of the Action Plans adopted by the Committee of Ministers and co-ordinated by the Office of the Directorate General of Programmes.

The Secretary General of the Congress informs the Bureau and the committees regularly about the progress of co-operation programmes, in addition to the information provided by the chair of the Monitoring Committee about the post-monitoring and post-election observation activities. An update on these programmes is also included in the activity report presented to the Committee of Ministers twice a year by the Secretary General of the Congress.

Co-operation activities are set up in order to build a bridge between Strasbourg (its work and standards) and the field, and to serve the goal of strengthening local and regional democracy throughout Europe.

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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