

PRIORITIES OF THE CONGRESS 2017-2020



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

The Congress

Le Congrès

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Priorités du Congrès 2017-2020

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Foreword by Gudrun Mosler-Törnström, President of the Congress



Gudrun Mosler-Törnström

The Congress priorities for 2017-2020 were adopted during the 31st session in October 2016.

They were prepared after a wide consultation process which started in December 2015, a process which involved the Bureau members, the two Chambers, the three Committees, all Congress members and the national associations of local and regional authorities.

The priorities, as laid down in this report, build on the work already achieved during the period 2013-2016 and form the general framework in which the Congress will be able to undertake its statutory and thematic activities.

Two main areas of work are proposed: strengthening the quality of local and regional democracy and building secure societies that are respectful, inclusive and closer to citizens.

On the one hand, it is necessary to carry out the statutory activities of the Congress which aim at the proper functioning of local and regional authorities and their ability to provide adequate services to citizens and

on the other hand, activities aimed at contributing to the maintenance of cohesion, security, social stability and equality in our societies.

These two areas of work cover a wide range of activities all converging towards the same, objective: the defence of grassroots democracy, closer to citizens.

Local and regional authorities have become essential to the democratic functioning of European societies. They can contribute very concretely to finding long-term solutions and strategies. As such, they should be fully consulted and involved in the development of national policies in areas that affect them or which directly impact them.

The urgent issues such as the integration of refugees and migrants and the fight against violent extremism and terrorism are certainly registered for a long time in the political agendas of member States. The international context may well change in the years to come and we may have to adapt our priorities and activities.

The priorities as laid down here constitute a framework and within this framework, the Congress will give itself flexibility to decide on the timetable and the modalities for the implementation of its activities.

In doing so, it will always strive to fulfil its statutory mission and to ensure that its activities are relevant and effective in producing concrete results.

The priorities will be integrated and transposed into the future work programmes of the Chamber of Local Authorities, the Chamber of Regions and by the three Committees – Monitoring, Governance and Current Affairs.

The priorities of the Congress will be implemented by the Congress and the local, regional and national authorities, as well as with the institutional partners of the Congress.

I invite you to support this work programme and to share with us the responsibility and the commitment for its concrete implementation.

Contribution by the President of the Congress Chamber of Local Authorities



Anders Knappe

When I look back over the past years of the work of this Chamber I am struck by how far we have come, how far we have moved forward in our work. We have realised an unprecedented strengthening of our statutory obligations, our monitoring of the charter, our observation of local elections and the post-monitoring dialogue that we have introduced to ensure effective implementation of our recommendations.

We have begun to systematically work with each member state, within the context of our monitoring and post-monitoring activities, to ensure that all the provisions of the Charter are applied, and not just the minimum. As this work progresses, we are steadily advancing towards our goal of achieving a harmonised European legal space with respect to local democracy.

The last two years have seen dramatic challenges for our societies in Europe. I am struck by the fact that the Congress is constantly finding itself at the crossroads of current events. This is also the situation of our local authorities, our towns and cities.

We are often in the front line, those who are most directly affected by the crises that Europe is facing, whether it is terrorism, the increasing radicalisation that we are seeing in our societies or the unprecedented refugee crisis, the rise in political extremism in all its forms and talk of the end of the European project.

What strikes me each time is the key role that the Congress – and our Chamber in particular - can play in relation to these issues. We have this role because of our privileged position of proximity with our citizens - those who have to face these issues on a daily basis.

We have a vital contribution to make, but only if we are treated as partners, with respect, on an equal footing with other levels of government. As I have said on other occasions, proper consultation is indispensable in this respect.

Contribution by the President of the Congress Chamber of Regions



Gunn Marit Helgesen

The Chamber of Regions, since its creation alongside the Chamber of Local Authorities in 1993, has become a pillar for the implementation of Congress priorities. As for previous years, the Chamber will contribute to those defined for 2017-2020.

Within our member States, regions have an important role to play, in complementarity and with optimised synergies with other tiers of government. Indeed, wherever they exist, despite different degrees of competencies and autonomy, regions are key actors at political, economic, social and cultural levels and they must be recognised as such.

The current situation in Europe, with issues such as the economic crises, unprecedented migrant flows, radicalisation, terrorism and diverse threats to inclusive, safe and fair societies, raises citizens' expectations in the politicians they have elected, which includes those at regional level.

Regions must play a part in addressing these issues. They must commit further to co-operation, in order to ensure exchange of good practices and come up

with proposals that address these challenges. The work programme of the Chamber of Regions, and the debates to be held during its sessions, will provide valuable guidance in this respect.

Regional democracy and regionalisation remains a major political issue in today's Europe. Congress monitoring, post-monitoring and co-operation activities will continue to document and analyse the on-going trends in this respect and wherever appropriate, will prepare specific recommendations. The Chamber of Regions will continue to act as a committed advocate of regional democracy through the promotion of the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, which will have its 10th Anniversary in 2019, as an instrument to promote political stability and territorial integrity.

In a globalising world, regions are, in full respect of the subsidiarity principle, a solid cornerstone for ensuring a balanced approach respecting common values and norms as well as regional specificities. The Chamber will encourage regions' efforts to promote active citizen participation in regional democratic processes and regional elections allowing citizens to influence decisions that affect their daily lives.

European regions that face depopulation and loss of public services are a growing concern. With predominantly rural regions representing over a third of the European territory, citizens risk exclusion from a large variety of services and opportunities. Such issues must be urgently addressed.

To meet these challenges for the four upcoming years, the Chamber will need the support and the participation of Congress members and of the citizens they represent, but it will also count on a close co-operation with the organisations and associations representing regions and regional assemblies at European level.

Congress priorities 2017-2020

Introduction

1. The preparation of the priorities for 2017-2020 constituted a key opportunity for the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to reflect on its role, its work and strategic approach for the years ahead.
2. The Congress is committed to pursuing its work in the spirit of the reform it began in 2010 and to working with the aim of increasing its political and operational responsibilities and enhancing the impact of its recommendations and resulting co-operation activities.
3. In setting its priorities, the Congress has sought to ensure that it responds to the needs of the authorities it represents and that it continues to improve the relevance and effectiveness of its activities on the ground.
4. Furthermore, it has enhanced its institutional role as the third political body of the Council of Europe and the only political assembly to defend the interests of local and regional authorities throughout greater Europe. It will continue to provide these authorities with a platform where they can present their know-how and experience in addressing the challenges they face and where they can share good practice and solutions to problems common at all levels of governance.
5. As a representative body of local and regional authorities, the Congress helps to provide answers to the difficulties they face and identify the tools necessary for the proper functioning of local and regional democracy. It also helps to strengthen the voice of the local and regional level vis-à-vis central and federal governments, within the Council of Europe and other European organisations.
6. the Committee of Ministers in 1994 and recently amended in July 2015 (see Appendix II).
8. The role of the Congress is to promote local and regional democracy, strengthen authorities' self-government and improve local and regional governance. It monitors the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122, hereinafter "the Charter") and the Council of Europe Reference Framework for Regional Democracy by member States and the holding of free and fair elections at local and regional levels.
9. The Congress provides its members and its institutional partners in the Council of Europe and beyond with a platform for the exchange of ideas, experiences and good practice. It encourages these exchanges and partnerships, and seeks to strengthen dialogue between all players in the field of local self-government and regional democracy.
10. In addition to its role as a forum for exchange, the Congress is a consultative body for the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe as well as a monitoring body, and it carries out co-operation and thematic activities.
11. In 2014, Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland set out his priorities for the Council of Europe during his second term of office. These "seven imperatives" aimed at increasing the relevance and effectiveness of the Organisation.
12. Top priority was given to strengthening the European Court of Human Rights and the principle of shared responsibility. The second imperative was the strengthening and expansion of co-operation with member States. The third priority was the upholding of democratic principles. The fourth priority was to provide assistance to neighbouring countries by introducing the next generation of neighbourhood partnerships. The fifth imperative was to strengthen the role of the European Social Charter (ETS No. 163) and the sixth was to make the Organisation stronger and more cohesive. Lastly, the seventh imperative was to enhance the Council of Europe's operational capacity.

The role of the Congress in the Council of Europe

6. The Congress implements the local and regional dimension of the Council of Europe's activities in the fields of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.
7. It was established in its present form in 1994. Its terms of reference and operation are based on the Congress Charter and Statutory Resolution, adopted by the member States meeting within
13. On the basis of these "seven imperatives" and the Council of Europe's programmes and budget,

the Congress will continue to support the values and standards of the Organisation, defending respect for human rights, the rule of law and democracy while contributing to the building of more inclusive societies for the citizens of Europe. It will focus in particular on implementing the Council of Europe's policies, conventions and campaigns, seeking, among other things, to incorporate a gender dimension, children's rights and the rights of civil society into all its activities and texts.

14. The Congress will continue to work closely with other entities of the Council of Europe in areas of common interest and with its external institutional partners, such as the Committee of the Regions of the European Union and the national and European associations representing local and regional authorities.

Implementation of the priorities 2013-2016

15. The previous priorities adopted by the Congress at the October 2012 session for the period 2013-2016 focused on three key areas:
 - ▶ raising the quality of local and regional democracy and human rights in Europe;
 - ▶ rising to the new challenges resulting from the economic and financial crisis;
 - ▶ developing co-operation and partnerships.
16. In order to implement these priorities, the Congress has strengthened its monitoring activities, refocused its work in line with the authorities' needs and enhanced its political dialogue with governments and institutional partners, while at the same time putting in place tools aimed at ensuring visible and sustainable results in the field. It has also sought to identify and anticipate trends and developments and continued to adapt to political and societal changes in member States and at European level.
17. As part of the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the observation of local elections, the Congress has increased the number and the quality of its missions and adopted new rules in this respect in order to maintain high standards in its work. It has paid special attention to following up its recommendations and their implementation by the member States and has stepped up its co-operation with other organisations. In particular, it has strengthened dialogue with governments by adopting post-monitoring procedures to give practical follow-up to its recommendations, and implemented co-operation and partnership activities in several member States, specifically to respond

to recurring issues identified during its monitoring activities and its observation of elections.

18. The Congress has raised awareness among local and regional authorities of the importance of upholding human rights by including this dimension in the role and activities of its Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by member states of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Monitoring Committee) and by developing performance indicators. It has promoted the networking of cities and regions for the reception of migrants and refugees and has drawn up a number of strategies and tools, in particular in the field of fighting violent extremism and radicalisation.
19. It has contributed to the projects and campaigns undertaken by the Council of Europe, such as the ONE in FIVE Campaign, which it has promoted at local level with its Pact of Towns and Regions against sexual violence towards children. It has also supported the No Hate Speech Youth Campaign and the Council of Europe Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, Including Domestic Violence.
20. It has encouraged its members to seek to protect the most vulnerable population groups, including the Roma, and in this connection it set up the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion. It has promoted greater citizen participation in local and regional life, especially through its European Local Democracy Week (ELDW). It has encouraged local and regional authorities to guarantee the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.
21. As part of its strategy against radicalisation at local level, it has issued guidelines on the prevention of radicalisation leading to terrorism for local and regional authorities, and begun devising tools to promote interfaith dialogue at local level.
22. Its work has been undertaken and led by Congress members, with the support of its secretariat and in co-operation with other institutional partners both within the Council of Europe – in particular the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the operational directorates general – and outside it, with other international organisations such as the European Union and its Committee of the Regions, and with national and European associations of local and regional authorities and partners such as the European Forum for Urban Security.

23. During the October 2015 session, the President of the Congress and the presidents of the chambers presented a mid-term evaluation of the work carried out in the framework of these priorities. The adoption of the new priorities for the next term of Congress during the October 2016 session will be an opportunity for the Congress President and the presidents of the chambers to present a global assessment of the work carried out and implementation of the priorities 2013-2016.
29. It will pursue its dialogue with the national associations of local and regional authorities, in order to involve them in Congress activities and to advocate their role with the member States' governments.

Outlook for 2017-2020

24. The economic and financial crisis of recent years has had a broad national and European impact, which has also had a huge influence on the functioning and quality of local and regional democracy. Local and regional authorities have been faced with the consequences of the crisis, notably in terms of loss of autonomy, lack of resources and indebtedness. A trend towards recentralisation has, moreover, been observed in several member States.
25. Furthermore, authorities have also been facing new challenges, such as the difficulties associated with the management of high numbers of refugees and migrants, the long-term integration of these new population groups, and the rise of various forms of extremism, rejection, nationalism and terrorism in European societies.
26. The new priorities for 2017-2020 take these developments into account and reflect the particular local and regional consequences of national, European and international developments. They also look at how new technologies will impact and change political life at local level over the coming years and how access to these new technologies – the internet in particular – can be promoted in rural areas and for the elderly.
27. They build on the work already achieved during the period 2013-2016 and represent in this regard continuity in the work of the Congress. They form the general framework in which the Congress will be able to undertake its statutory and specific activities and develop its tools in order to help authorities face up to the challenges and deal with the specific difficulties they meet in the exercise of their responsibilities towards their citizens.
28. The Congress will enhance its close co-operation with its institutional partners inside the Council of Europe and outside it, in particular with the EU Committee of the Regions and the European associations of local and regional authorities.
30. The Congress will continue its efforts to give its work more visibility, in particular by promoting and circulating its reference documents and texts and developing new working tools for its members and stakeholders.
31. When identifying and drafting the priorities between October 2015 and October 2016, the rapporteurs consulted widely with members of the Congress and the national and European associations of local and regional authorities. They have incorporated the specific contributions of the members of the Plenary Bureau, the Bureau of the Chamber of Local Self-Government and the Bureau of the Chamber of Regions and of the three Congress committees – Monitoring, Governance and Current Affairs.
32. The priorities of the Congress will be implemented by its two chambers and three committees and will be reflected in their work programmes.
33. The Bureau of the Congress will be responsible for ensuring implementation of the priorities in the activities of the Congress. It will make a mid-term assessment of the priorities and their relevance in the light of political developments in Europe and in the member States and will, where necessary, update them.

B. The priorities

I. Enhancing the quality of local and regional democracy

34. Democracy is one of the basic European values and local and regional democracy is that closest to citizens.
35. The primary role of the Congress is to promote and defend local and regional democracy in keeping with the values and priorities of the Council of Europe. In this respect, the Congress promotes multilevel governance throughout Europe.
36. In Articles 3 and 4 of the Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2015)9 relating to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the revised Charter appended thereto, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe entrusts the Congress with monitoring activities in connection with the European Charter of Local Self-Government and with the observation of

local and regional elections. The full wording of these articles is reproduced in Appendix II.

37. At its 1112th meeting in April 2011, the Committee of Ministers encouraged the governments of member States to take account, when implementing governance policies and territorial reforms, of the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, adopted in Utrecht in November 2009 by the ministers responsible for local and regional autonomy.
38. In carrying out its work, the Congress contributes to reinforcing and guaranteeing local and regional democracy, particularly in the context of the economic crisis and its consequences for local and regional authorities. In the coming years, the Congress will pay special attention to new trends and will combat any reduction in the powers and autonomy of municipalities.
39. In particular, it will continue to work towards compliance with the concomitance principle between the competences of local authorities and the financial resources which are allocated to them by central governments, as provided by Article 9 of the European Charter of Local Self-government. It will also continue to seek overall incentives aimed at continuing the processes of decentralisation and strengthening of local and regional democracy.

a) Promoting local democracy

40. As Europe's populations become increasingly urbanised, the management of towns and cities is becoming more and more crucial for citizens' quality of life. At the same time, Europe's populations are changing fast, becoming increasingly mobile and diverse, which in itself brings new tensions, issues relating to living together and security problems. These trends also affect the relations between rural and urban communities, which the Congress will continue to follow.
41. Fundamental to the principle of subsidiarity is the conviction that it is local authorities which are best placed to meet the needs of citizens and to put forward solutions to their problems. A few years ago (in 2008) the Congress adopted its "European Urban Charter II – Manifesto for a new urbanity", setting out these challenges and offering guidelines on how they should be tackled.
42. In 2015 the Chamber of Local Authorities adopted a report ¹ on "New forms of local governance".
43. The Congress, and in particular its Chamber of Local Authorities, will continue to debate,

share experience and put forward solutions to the problems facing Europe's towns and cities, including in areas of urban development, environment and the preservation of cultural and architectural heritage. It will promote the quality and accessibility of public services delivered by local communities.

44. It will continue to identify changing trends in local public services, local governance and central-local relations.
45. It will pursue its work to improve local democracy through increased citizen participation at local level and to support local authorities in their work to build safer and more inclusive societies.

b) Promoting regional democracy

46. The Congress is convinced that regional democracy is a factor for political and territorial stability in Europe. It keeps a close watch on trends in regionalisation in its member States and stands ready to provide its support and expertise wherever needed. In recent years, it adopted three important reports on "Regions and territories with special status in Europe" (October 2013), "Trends in regionalisation in Council of Europe member States" (October 2015) and "Autonomy and borders in an evolving Europe" (March 2016).
47. As a follow-up to this work, the Congress will continue to act as a strong advocate of regional democracy throughout Europe. It will further promote, including through its monitoring, post-monitoring and co-operation activities, the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, which will have its 10th Anniversary in 2019, as an instrument fostering political stability and territorial integrity.
48. It will pursue and strengthen its co-operation with European regional associations, in particular through its Chamber of Regions, and develop the regional dimension of its co-operation with the Committee of the Regions of the European Union.

c) Monitoring local and regional democracy

49. Monitoring of local and regional democracy and the observation of local and regional elections are among the core activities of the Congress. Over the last few years, the Congress has developed a coherent monitoring practice, streamlined its procedures and consequently introduced new Rules and Procedures.
50. The quality of local and regional democracy requires compliance with international law, which generates obligations for those States that have ratified relevant treaties, such as the

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European Charter of Local Self-Government and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207).

51. In addition to these texts, which impose a number of legal obligations on member States and local and regional authorities, the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy is also a collection of guidelines that States can learn from when they are in the process of reform or reflecting on regional democracy.
52. Lastly, the recommendations addressed by the Congress to the authorities of the States concerned also form a reference base and a key vehicle for strengthening the quality of local and regional democracy.
53. On a regular basis, the Congress draws up country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all member States and ensures, in particular, that the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government are implemented in domestic law. It submits its recommendations to the Committee of Ministers, which forwards them to the governments concerned.
54. The Congress will continue to promote the implementation of these reference texts by States and monitor the policies and reforms pursued in the field.
55. The Congress will continue to organise monitoring visits to all Council of Europe member States on a regular basis and to adopt recommendations on improvements to be made by the national authorities in law and in practice.
56. Considering the consequences of the economic crisis for local and regional communities, the Congress will ensure, in particular, that the financial support provided for municipal activities and services is adequate, in accordance with the principles of the Charter.
57. The Congress will prepare, at least once during each term of office, a compilation of the main findings resulting from monitoring the situation of local and regional democracy in the member States, which will identify recurring issues in the light of the Charter and on which the Congress should focus its actions in order to better assist member States. The result of this process of scrutiny will inform the dialogue with the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the member States.

d) Applicability of the Charter in the member States

58. In 2013, the Congress identified the recurring issues appearing in its monitoring recommendations submitted to States. This made it possible

to pinpoint the main challenges that are common to all national authorities in terms of local democracy issues and enabled the Congress to target its actions and its assistance more accurately and so meet the needs of States more effectively. It informed the Committee of Ministers of these recurrent issues and decided to present an update every three years.

59. The Charter is one of Council of Europe conventions that offer a particular system of ratification "à la carte". In ratifying the Charter, States undertake to comply with a core of articles covering fundamental principles whose ratification is compulsory. At the same time, Article 12 enables States to refrain from ratifying specific provisions of the Charter. This flexibility makes it possible to accommodate the diversity and specific features of local government structures in member States. But Article 12 also lays down that each State ratifying the Charter considers itself to be bound by it. Consequently, the Charter is applicable and thus can be directly invoked before courts.
60. The Congress will continue to advocate the implementation of all provisions of the Charter, encouraging, particularly through political dialogue as part of its monitoring and/or post-monitoring activities, the ratification of provisions not yet ratified by certain States, so that 100% of the Charter will, as far as possible, cover 100% of the territory of Europe.
61. In addition, the Congress will pay particular attention to the applicability of the Charter in order to curb any reluctance or refusal to apply it.
62. It will, on a regular basis, take stock of the situation, including identifying those member States that have not fully ratified and/or transposed the Charter into domestic legislation, and will submit its updates to the Committee of Ministers.
63. It will also continue to keep a close watch on trends in regionalisation and to promote the development and strengthening of regions, on the basis, in particular, of the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy. It will also continue to reflect on the potential of regional structures and institutions in the reduction of regional tensions.

e) Dialogue with member States

64. The Congress maintains a regular political dialogue with member States through the Committee of Ministers, as well as through bilateral meetings with governments of member States in the framework of post-monitoring activities. This dialogue seeks to promote the principles of local self-government and to work

directly with governments in order to better implement the European Charter on Local Self-government which they have ratified. This co-operation with national authorities is a precondition for strengthening the implementation of Congress recommendations on local and regional democracy. It is based on constructive discussion of the main challenges that national, local and regional authorities have to deal with and is the key to finding relevant solutions.

65. The Congress will pursue its regular dialogue with the Committee of Ministers, its rapporteur groups and its steering committees.
66. It will continue to share its expertise with interested States and to offer its support for reforms on the basis of a roadmap drawn up jointly with the authorities of the States concerned, including a timetable for implementation of the measures on which they have agreed.
67. As part of this effort it will continue to promote a structured and regular political dialogue with those member States that have either not fully ratified the Charter (and/or its additional protocol) or not transposed it into national legislation, in order to identify ways in which they can be supported in ensuring the implementation of Congress's recommendations in full compliance with the Charter.

f) Observing local and regional elections

68. In addition to its monitoring activities of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the Congress observes local and regional elections upon invitation by the national or regional authorities responsible for the organisation of elections. As a result of these observation missions, which lead to reports and recommendations, the Congress helps to improve electoral processes based on international standards and, more generally, to foster greater democratic stability in Europe.
69. In recent years, the Congress has enhanced its co-operation with strategic partners working in the field of election observation, in particular the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR), the EU Committee of the Regions and the Venice Commission, whose Council for Democratic Elections is currently being chaired by the Congress. This has enabled the Congress to have a greater impact and a higher profile within the Council of Europe and beyond.
70. The Congress will continue to organise missions to observe local and regional elections, where appropriate, in co-operation with other

European institutions. It will develop country-specific recommendations based on actual observations in the field, together with reports on recurring across-the-board electoral issues, including the quality of voters' lists, misuse of administrative resources during campaigns and voting rights at local and regional levels.

71. In addition, it will pursue dialogue with stakeholders in the respective countries for a more consistent implementation of its recommendations in the interest of further democratic development.

g) Awareness raising of human rights at local and regional levels

72. The Congress has undertaken to make local and regional elected representatives more aware of the human rights dimension in carrying out their responsibilities regarding the daily lives of local residents. This includes the social dimension of human rights enshrined in the European Social Charter.
73. It has collected data and examples of good practice on implementation of these rights by local and regional authorities. In May 2015, it organised an international forum, with the participation of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, during which the Graz Declaration on the Implementation of Human Rights was adopted.
74. The Graz Declaration sets out the parameters of a series of activities that the Congress will implement as part of an action plan in the coming years. These will include an international symposium in 2017 and the drawing up of a practical handbook to provide elected officials with the tools enabling them to take appropriate decisions that are in full compliance with human rights in areas which have an impact on fundamental freedoms, (for example in the fight against radicalisation and terrorism).
75. The Congress will continue and intensify its work on awareness raising, in co-operation with other partners.

h) Promoting ethics and transparency at local and regional levels

76. Good political governance is based on the population's trust, and elected representatives at all levels must therefore act as role models for society as a whole. In Recommendation 383 (2015) on conditions of office of elected representatives, the Congress states that "Those in public office should uphold high standards of integrity and make decisions free from personal interest or other inappropriate considerations".

77. The Congress will work to identify ways to prevent corruption, notably through the strengthening of values based on ethics and transparency, including transparency in declarations of interest and public procurement. In particular, it will promote rigorous governance frameworks and the development of common standards, as part of an overall and cross-sectoral strategy, which will also involve other international organisations and specialised entities. The Congress will also support the development and widening the use of e-democracy tools at local and regional levels, as this can help to increase transparency and improve participation of citizens.
78. Reports will be drawn up and the 1999 European Code of conduct for the political integrity of local and regional elected representatives will be revised and extended to cover executive staff and officials in local and regional government.

i) Implementing co-operation programmes

79. Fully involved in the preparation of Council of Europe action plans, the Congress Secretariat develops and implements co-operation projects at local and regional levels. These activities take into account the Congress's monitoring and election observation reports as well as its thematic priorities, and are driven by the demand of the member States themselves. The guidelines adopted in March 2015 on "Improving the impact of Congress recommendations – Guidelines for co-operation activities in Council of Europe member States" serve as a basis for implementation.
80. The co-operation projects will consist mainly of a series of peer-to-peer exchanges and interactive sessions with the participation of Congress members and experts. Easily adaptable to specific target groups, relevant themes and local contexts, these projects aim at encouraging local and regional authorities, as well as other relevant stakeholders, to take action in the field to further implement the principles of the Charter and the recommendations of Congress. Roundtable discussions, seminars and workshops are designed to be an experience of mutual learning and sharing of know-how and knowledge.
81. By supporting the implementation of the principles of local and regional democracy, developing the competencies of local elected representatives (women and men) and enhancing their institutional capacity, promoting consultation among local and regional authorities, and increasing citizen participation, these co-operation programmes will support the Congress in its primary mission to ensure the full application

of democratic principles at local and regional levels in Europe.

82. The co-operation programmes will further strengthen the already well-established synergies with the activities of the Council of Europe's Directorate General of Democracy and its Centre of Expertise for the Reform of Local Administration.

II. Building safe and inclusive societies that respect diversity

83. The aim of good local governance is to create an environment and living conditions that will be conducive to citizens' development and well-being. The Congress is convinced that local and regional authorities are more and more responsive to the expectations of their citizens in this respect and that they must find ways of nurturing more diversified societies, increasing the intergenerational balance of interests and ensuring safe and prosperous living conditions.
84. The purpose of representative democracy is to ensure that all population groups have an equal opportunity to voice their opinions and influence decision making in areas that concern them. Interaction between local residents and decision makers and improved communication both serve to strengthen inclusion, joint responsibility of and co-operation between citizens, civil society, decision makers and local governments as well as non-governmental organisations. It creates the necessary preconditions for the strengthening the vitality and viability of local democracy.
85. The Congress will assist municipalities in exercising their tasks, especially in ensuring quality and accessibility of public and municipal services, increasing civic involvement of citizens, and searching for solutions to a range of challenges, particularly in terms of security, integration, dialogue and respect for fundamental human and social rights.
86. The implementation of the Council of Europe Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies (2016-2019) at local and regional levels will be at the centre of its work.

a) Combating radicalisation and violent extremism

87. Since the end of 2014, radicalisation and violent extremism have resulted in an upsurge in deadly terrorist acts in many cities around the world. These attacks highlight the urgent need for cities to take more initiatives to combat extremism and radicalisation,

88. As part of the Council of Europe's comprehensive action plan for 2015-2017 on The Fight against Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism, the Congress drew up a strategy to combat this phenomenon in cities and regions. As part of this strategy, it produced a document on "Prevention of radicalisation and manifestations of hate at grassroots level – Guidelines for local and regional authorities" and launched the "Alliance of European cities against violent extremism", a platform for exchange aimed at facilitating co-operation between cities with regard to the prevention of radicalisation.
89. The Congress will continue to develop this strategy in order to find lasting solutions, based in particular on prevention and education. Prevention measures and education can increase youth inclusion and strengthen their own capabilities to resist violence-provoking propaganda. The Congress will help by promoting the exchange of good practice in this field.
90. In general terms, the Congress will continue to combat all forms of violent extremism and manifestations of hate at local level.

b) Integration of refugees and migrants

91. In most States, national governments and parliaments have the main responsibility for immigration policy, including the policy on refugees. The humanitarian responsibility is shared by local and regional authorities. Municipalities and regions also have an important role in promoting the integration, participation and non-discrimination of immigrants and in encouraging good relations between them and local residents. Local authorities should thus be actively involved in the drafting and implementation of the State's immigration policy.
92. In 2015, the Congress held several debates on the refugee and migrant crisis during its plenary sessions and adopted a declaration in which it stated that, in the face of a humanitarian emergency on this scale, all local and regional authorities must play a major role in refugee reception arrangements, regardless of their geographical position in Europe. It also underlined the Congress's deep commitment to social cohesion and harmonious co-existence in a multicultural society and highlighted the rich contribution made by migrants to European societies.
93. The Congress will help with the networking of cities in order that their activities and initiatives for the reception of refugees and the long-term integration of migrants can be co-ordinated more effectively. In particular, it will promote the exchange of good practice and peer-to-peer

training within European networks, which have been working on these subjects for a long time.

94. It will also work to strengthen solidarity and burden-sharing in the reception and integration of migrants between authorities in all European States.
95. In particular, it will promote good practice concerning children and young people, whose integration in the new culture and in daily life must be strongly encouraged.

c) Promoting intercultural dialogue

96. Cities, regions and States should work together to promote respect and tolerance in European societies. It is important to bridge the gaps and ignorance that divide cultures, and to promote the role of education in the acquisition of the skills needed for democratic culture. Local authorities should create public spaces that bring citizens together and allow the expression of freedom of religion or non-religious belief in a spirit of dialogue and exchange.
97. The Congress will promote further dialogue between the different population groups. It will support mutual adaptation and acceptance by local residents of other groups such as migrants.
98. It will be closely involved in the Council of Europe Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies (2016-2019) and, in this context, the No Hate Speech Youth Campaign. In particular, it will develop the local and regional dimension of the campaign.
99. Furthermore, it will help local and regional authorities to facilitate interfaith dialogue, in particular by devising educational tools that they can use to organise intercultural and interfaith activities.

d) Active participation of citizens

100. The quality of democracy depends above all on citizens' trust in their public institutions and their participation in the democratic process. Citizen participation is the bridge and vehicle for achieving the twin goals of improving the quality of local democracy and building more inclusive societies.
101. The involvement of citizens and increased dialogue with their elected representatives must be integrated into all levels of governance. In this respect, the Congress relies on 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), which was opened for signature in 2009.

102. Furthermore, since 2007, in October each year, the Congress has called on all member and several non-member States to hold European Local Democracy Week, encouraging the participating authorities to organise events for and with citizens around annual themes decided upon in line with the Congress's priorities.
103. Within the framework of its monitoring activities in particular, the Congress will continue to encourage national authorities to sign and ratify the additional protocol, especially as a number of countries that have not yet ratified it nevertheless already apply its provisions in practice.
104. Furthermore, the Congress will continue to support the development of activities and initiatives such as ELDW in order to promote the active participation of citizens.
105. It will also continue to be involved in the preparation and follow-up of the World Forum for Democracy, which has been held by the Council of Europe since 2012, and to actively participate in the event.

e) Youth empowerment

106. The Congress makes great efforts to enhance the participation of young people in the decision-making process and the public life of their communities. It promotes in particular the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, adopted in 2003.
107. Since 2014, it has involved youth delegates in its work, especially during plenary sessions. The Congress has created an ad hoc reflection group on how to encourage young people to participate in decision-making processes at European level, and has adopted reports on specific issues that affect the daily lives and the future of young people.
108. Active participation in the sessions and in the reflection group will continue. Based on this work, the Congress will continue to carry out targeted activities to enhance young people's trust and interest in political institutions and to promote their active participation.
109. The work in the reflection group should help to build a vision of a "young European in the 2020s" and to identify the opportunities which must be created.
110. The Congress will also encourage a greater level of commitment and improved dialogue between local and regional authorities and the education systems across Europe in order to enhance civic involvement, encourage greater youth participation and combat the radicalisation of young people.

f) Rights and protection of minority, underprivileged and vulnerable populations

111. The role of local, regional and national authorities is to protect their citizens, having due regard for their diversity, especially when they are in a minority or in vulnerable situations. Authorities must adopt and implement policies in order to guarantee respect for their fundamental rights and ensure their integration into society. In particular, authorities must ensure that people in vulnerable situations are informed about their fundamental and human rights in an effective and comprehensible manner.
112. The Congress will participate in the implementation of Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021) and encourage the exchange of best practices in the field of the protection children's rights among its members.
113. It will continue to encourage action in support of Roma inclusion, to be taken at local level, in particular under the "European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion" set up by the Congress in 2013.
114. It will continue to promote equality between women and men and encourage measures taken to prevent violence against women.
115. It will continue to defend the rights of LGBT people and fight all forms of discrimination against them.
116. Furthermore, it will contribute to the Council of Europe strategy 2017-2023 to promote the rights and full representation and participation of people with disabilities in society.
117. It will continue its commitment to promoting regional and minority languages, in particular the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ETS No. 148).
118. It will promote better access to proximity services and to new technologies such as the internet for elderly people, so that they are not isolated or disconnected from society.

g) Empowering rural areas

119. For decades, the trend in many European countries has been the development of cities and large urban centres to the detriment of rural areas. The disappearance of public services and public transport, small businesses and jobs causes people in remote areas to migrate to the capital cities or towns in the hope of finding jobs, a better quality of life and services such as hospitals, medical professionals, schools, transport and means of communication, etc. This exodus leads to a dramatic depopulation of rural areas

and the exclusion or even the abandonment of whole sections of the population who cannot migrate in this way, particularly because of their age, their inability to pay the cost of living and housing in cities or simply because they do not want to leave their land.

120. With predominantly rural regions representing over a third of European territory, it is urgent for national as well as for regional and local authorities to develop comprehensive policies ensuring that the European standards of living that are praised as a model throughout the world are applied equally to both urban and rural areas.
121. The Congress, with the support of national associations of local and regional authorities, will help to promote the potential of rural areas and to highlight their strengths and qualities.
122. The Governance Committee will prepare a report on "A better future for Europe's rural regions" that will be presented at the October 2017 session and that will focus on the issues mentioned above by looking at territorial cohesion, social sustainability, employment, capacity building and infrastructure development.
123. The Congress will also support initiatives to repopulate and revitalise these areas.

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 648 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.

The Congress implements projects aiming at building capacities of local and regional politicians in the framework of Council of Europe action plans.

It empowers mayors and councilors to perform as local leaders accountable to the populations they represent.

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

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