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Presentation of the report on Congress priorities for 2017-2020

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Dear Colleagues,

The draft report on the 2017-2020 priorities of the Congress, which you are invited to adopt today, has been prepared after a wide consultation process started in December 2015.

This consultation has 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 the report build on the work already achieved during the period 2013-2016 and represent both continuity and new elements in the action of the Congress.

They form the general framework in which the Congress will be able to undertake its statutory and thematic activities. These activities will be implemented with the local, regional and national authorities as well as with the institutional partners of the Congress. And you, dear colleagues, are the main actors of this work.

The adoption of the priorities for 2017-2020 is a good opportunity to recall the Congress' missions and strategic orientations:

Our Congress represents the local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe member States. It contributes to the inclusion of the local and regional dimension in the activities of the Council of Europe on democracy, rule of law, and human rights.

The priorities are based on the mandate of the Congress, which was defined by the first Summit of Heads of States and governments in Vienna in 1994 (you can find this mandate in Appendix 1 of the report)

According to its mandate, the primary mission of the Congress is to promote local and regional democracy and to identify tools necessary for its proper functioning.

Its goal is to ensure effective responses to the needs of local authorities and their citizens, while continuing to improve the relevance and effectiveness of its action within the Council of Europe priorities. It also helps to strengthen the local and regional voice vis-à-vis the central and federal governments and other European Organisations.

Two main areas of work are proposed for the period 2017-2020:

First area: Strengthening the quality of local and regional democracy:

- This covers the good functioning of local and regional communities as well as their level of autonomy and resources and their ability to deliver services to citizens.
- It includes the regular monitoring of the situation in member States and their implementation of the European Charter of local self-government as well as the observation of local elections,

the post-monitoring dialogue to ensure the implementation of our recommendations at national level, the conduct of cooperation programmes, the promotion of ethics and transparency and the fostering of active citizenship.

Second area: Building secure societies that are respectful, inclusive and closer to citizens.

- This covers the current challenges which communities face, the ways to ensure their better functioning and the fight against attempts to destabilise them.
- This includes combating radicalisation and violent extremism, integrating refugees and migrants, promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue and citizen's participation, in particular young people's participation as well as protecting the most vulnerable ones and integrating whole sections of our societies living on the margins. Here I would like to mention in particular the necessity to support and empower the rural zones and their citizens.

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

Dear colleagues,

The overall goal of these priorities is to continue to make the Congress' work relevant, efficient and result-oriented.

I invite you to adopt these priorities today and take an active part in their implementation in the coming four years of your mandate.

Thank you