

29th SESSION
Strasbourg, 20-22 October 2015

CG/2015(29)5FINAL
22 October 2015

Guidelines for local and regional authorities on preventing radicalisation and manifestations of hate at the grassroots level

Current Affairs Committee
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Summary

The report discusses the concept of radicalisation and explores the various approaches to tackling the problem such as repression, prevention and reintegration of radicalised individuals, with concrete examples from local and regional levels of government in Council of Europe member States. It engages with urban security and safety issues, recognising that security is part of fundamental rights, and underlines the necessity to balance the measures taken to combat radicalisation against the precepts of human rights, the rule of law and the aim to build inclusive and cohesive societies.

The report recommends that local and regional authorities design strategies to involve civil society in their work against radicalisation and extremism in all its manifestations, including hate speech, anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment and action. It also recommends that they communicate their strategies to the general public in a balanced and responsible way, with a particular emphasis on a cohesive discourse, exchange of good practice information, and that they support exit programs for individuals willing to leave extremism and allocate the necessary resources to combat radicalisation. Finally, it insists on the necessity to build alliances with credible partners and to aim for co-operation and co-ordination of their actions with the regional and, where appropriate, the national level.

1 L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

Guidelines for local and regional authorities on preventing radicalisation and manifestations of hate at the grassroots level

RESOLUTION 384 (2015)²

1. The terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen, involving armed jihadists and leaving a total of 14 people dead and 10 wounded, highlighted the need for cities to do more in order to effectively tackle extremism. These attacks have thrown the spotlight on the issues at stake: Growing radicalisation leading to violent extremism and sectarianism within cities, the risk of increased polarisation in society and stigmatisation of some communities, hate speech in the social media as well as the risk of censorship and self-censorship are all current dangers facing cities.

2. In its Resolution 381 (2015), adopted at its March 2015 session, the Congress committed itself to updating the relevant texts of the Congress which promote citizen participation, living together in diversity, social inclusion and cohesion, intercultural and interfaith dialogue, to establishing guidelines for local and regional authorities on preventing radicalisation and manifestations of hate at grass-roots level, and to creating a pedagogical toolkit for use by local elected representatives when organising intercultural and inter-faith activities.

3. Individuals can become radicalised for a multitude of reasons, such as a lack of integration into society, political disengagement or exposure to extremist individuals, groups or organisations. The local, cultural and social context affects the radicalisation process, which is reflected in the public authorities' response. Among these, prevention and de-radicalisation (i.e. action directed to reintegrating individuals who have become radicalised into society) rather than repression are actions that coincide with the scope and competences of local and regional authorities.

4. Tackling radicalisation requires carefully thought-out preventive measures. In the long run, prevention is more rational and cost-effective than combatting symptoms or full-blown crises. It is also the area of action *par excellence* for local authorities, where they can be most effective and where their competences and mandates are most relevant. At the same time, recognition of this important role leads to the empowerment of local governments and enables them to better anticipate these challenges and opportunities.

5. It is critical, for the respect of human rights, to approach the issue of safety and security of citizens in a balanced manner, weighing the necessity and proportionality of each action. When introducing any measures that might jeopardise individual rights, public authorities must keep in mind that not only the rule of law but also the strategic aim to build an inclusive society must guide their actions.

6. Recognising that radicalisation can be best contained at a level closest to the vulnerable individuals in the most affected communities, the Congress calls on the local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe to:

a. design local multi-agency strategies, in co-ordination with different levels of government, involving local partners and develop a plan of action mapping the local situation, setting up coordinating bodies and allocating the necessary resources to combat radicalisation, and take concrete measures that can be followed up;

b. communicate their strategies and actions to the general public in a balanced and responsible way, with a particular emphasis on a cohesive discourse, aiming for a clear presentation of the message, without stigmatising specific groups, and ensuring that security concerns do not overshadow the duty of respect for human rights and the rule of law;

c. encourage the setting-up of local safety partnerships, providing adequate training to the different actors involved, including frontline practitioners working with individuals or groups at risk, prison staff, social workers, teachers, and healthcare workers, in order to develop their understanding of the radicalisation process and how to respond to it;

² Debated and adopted by the Congress on 20 October 2015, 1st sitting (see Document CG/2015(29)5FINAL, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Leen VERBEEK, Netherlands (R, SOC).

d. raise awareness among local authorities on existing good practice to show local authorities who may fear that they are not equipped to deal with such situations or that radicalisation is not their priority, that many cities throughout Europe have significant experience in projects which can serve as a good resource in the battle against extremism and exchange knowledge and best practices with other European cities, at both the political and the administrative levels, through regular meetings bringing together the different European local actors;

e. highlight the important role of education especially regarding families and schools, with particular attention to topics such as respect for cultural diversity, human rights and the harmfulness of hate speech, acknowledging that young people, although particularly vulnerable to discourses inciting to hate and violence since they are in a formative period of their lives involving a struggle forming their identity, are also strong allies in combating manifestations of hate through their strong social media ties;

f. involve civil society in their work against radicalisation and extremism in all its manifestations, including hate speech, anti-Semitism and islamophobia, by setting up partnerships with NGOs, religious community leaders, and, at the individual level, with former extremists;

g. support exit programs for individuals willing to leave extremism, especially religious oriented extremism, in co-operation with civil society organisations;

h. allocate the necessary funds to their activities in this sphere, cognisant of the fact that preventive work must be considered as ordinary budget items with stable long-term financing;

i. build alliances with credible partners, striving for well-established routines for transparency as to how allocated resources are spent in their dealings with ethnic or religious associations when granting them financial support and coordinate activities with the regional and, when appropriate, the national level of government;

j. develop co-operation with international bodies that share the values and concerns of the Congress and who are currently working on topics relevant to the aim to combat radicalisation, such as the European Forum for Urban Security.

7. Aware that the work against radicalisation is a lengthy process that needs to be managed on a long-term basis, the Congress reiterates its determination to keep this issue on its agenda and to follow up its resolutions and activities through regular assessments of progress in the member States.

Guidelines for local and regional authorities on preventing radicalisation and manifestations of hate at the grassroots level

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM³

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen involving armed jihadists leaving a total of 14 people dead and 10 wounded highlighted the need for cities to do more in order to effectively tackle extremism. These attacks have brought the issues at stake in full light: Growing radicalisation leading to violent extremism and sectarianism within cities, risk of increased polarisation in society and stigmatisation of some communities, hate speech in the social media as well as the risk of censorship and self-censorship are all current dangers facing cities.

2. The Congress has been working for the last two decades on themes that aim 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, promoting integration and participation of people of migrants, intercultural and interfaith dialogue as well as resolutions on urban crime prevention, on the fight against racism at local and regional level and education for democratic citizenship.

3. The Congress Bureau adopted, on 2 February 2015, a “Strategy to combat radicalisation at grassroots level” followed by Resolution 381(2015)⁴ 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. Radicalisation is to some extent an “inclusion/cohesion” issue, but the ideological and even religious factors often underlying the process should not be neglected. An aspect of the necessity of a policy based on inclusion was, for instance, highlighted by former President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Giovanni Di Stasi, speaking on increased cooperation with local authorities to stem urban violence: “We can no longer tolerate parts of our cities becoming no-go areas and areas of social exclusion. A determined policy to integrate all members of the community is the only way of responding to these challenges”.⁵ Radicalisation is also a problem that requires preventive measures that local authorities are in a good position to deliver.

5. Even though the situation may appear grim, a positive perspective is needed to tackle this issue in the long run which underlines that, just as our societies are learning to live together in diversity, they will also learn to deal with the radicalisation of parts of their population. As noted in the Council of Europe’s action plan “Living Together”, “Diversity is here to stay. It is shaping Europe’s future in a fast-changing world, and will continue to do so. It is therefore vital that Europeans respond to its challenges in a more effective and wholehearted way – and, to be blunt, much better than they are currently doing.”⁶

6. Today many cities in Europe bring together people from dozens of different nationalities. Learning to live together is a slow process that can be painful but also a joyful one. Local governments have a responsibility towards those suffering from the effects of radicalisation within their communities which not only lead to some members of the community embracing violence but also to speak and act in ways that violate the freedom of speech and religion. The Congress has actively supported the Council of Europe’s No Hate Speech campaign (2012 – 2014) to raise awareness about hate speech online and the risks it poses for democracy and to support and show solidarity to people and groups targeted by hate speech online.

3 This explanatory memorandum is based on the document prepared by the Council of Europe consultant Juul van HOOFF, Stichting Movisie, which is available from the Secretariat upon request.

4 https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CG/2015%2828%2914PROV&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=CACC9A&BackColorLogged=EFEA9C#P41_2342

5 [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR603\(2005\)&Sector=secDCR&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=1EB1E9&BackColorIntranet=FFCD4F&BackColorLogged=FFC679](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR603(2005)&Sector=secDCR&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=1EB1E9&BackColorIntranet=FFCD4F&BackColorLogged=FFC679)

6 <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168008975a>

1.1. Radicalisation: a definition

7. Radicalisation is generally viewed as a process, sometimes leading to violent extremism and terrorism. This definition has been used by, for instance, the Council of Europe, the European Commission (EC) and by many scholars. The EC, in its texts, defines radicalisation as the “phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to acts of terrorism.”⁷ In this regard, radicalisation is not seen as a linear process passing fixed stages at a constant speed, but as a variable one depending on the local context and on individual factors.

8. There are multiple reasons that contribute to individuals becoming radicalised such as a lack of integration into society, political disengagement or exposure to extremist individuals, groups or organisations.⁸ The local, cultural and social context affects the radicalisation process which is reflected in the public authorities’ response. Among these, prevention and de-radicalisation (i.e. action directed to reintegrating individuals who have become radicalised into society) rather than repression are actions that coincide with the scope and competences of local and regional authorities.

9. Recognising that radicalisation can be best contained at a level closest to the vulnerable individuals in the most affected communities, the coordination and synergies between various government levels is an important dimension in protecting citizens against these threats; so is cooperation with civil society organisations, researchers and practitioners.

II. RESPONSES TO RADICALISATION: THREE COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES

10. Several initiatives have been launched in Europe with the objective of tackling radicalisation. The European Urban Charter 1992⁹ states that a coherent security and crime prevention policy must be based on prevention, law enforcement and mutual support. The approaches can differ in many aspects; in general though, they can broadly be sorted into three different categories already being used to deal with the problem.

11. Repression as a response to radicalisation is, traditionally, the responsibility of the national level and involves policing, legislation, and intelligence activities. It is an important aspect, but one over which local authorities in general have limited influence; it will therefore not be the focus of this report. It should also be mentioned that repression in a way “is always present” if enough evidence is gathered on an individual, so even if the same person is undergoing some kind of preventive approach, repressive measures are available depending on the circumstances. In that context, there is a link between repression and prevention.

12. Tackling radicalisation requires preventive measures, and in the long run, prevention is more rational and cost-effective than combatting symptoms or full-blown crises. It is also the area of action *par excellence* for local authorities where they can be most effective and where their competences and mandates are most relevant. Already in 2000, the Congress had, through its Resolution 99, invited local and regional authorities to develop “a more pro-active approach, anticipating and preventing problems rather than addressing them afterwards and favouring a long-term rather than a short-term approach”.

13. Such efforts can naturally take different forms. Indeed, what works in one city may not be the correct approach in another. Local dynamics play an important part in tailoring successful preventative work. It is also important to keep in mind that the prevention of violent radicalisation must be part of a global prevention strategy. It needs to be holistic but also integrated into other activities for urban security. This view has been summarised by the European Urban Charter in the following way: “Crime has a wide variety of causes. The responses must therefore be both diversified and coordinated.”¹⁰

14. Prevention also has benefits from a partnership approach. This is not just an issue for the police and the judiciary; to be effective it needs to include other sectors and civil society. For instance, former extremists with their unique insight can play a key role and be an important partner for local governments. Regarding Islamist extremism, partnerships with local mosques and religious community leaders can also be fruitful resources working together against extremism. However, it is important that such partnerships have a broader agenda than strictly security related ones. If trust and good partnerships are built over time working

7 http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/crisis-and-terrorism/radicalisation/index_en.htm

8 http://www.strategicdialogue.org/De-radicalisation_final.pdf

9 <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=887405>

10 European Urban Charter 1992

on various topics, bringing in security issues becomes more natural than if a partnership starts and ends with security related issues.

15. Reintegration of radicalised (and repented) people is the third category of possible responses. Just like prevention, this is an area where local governments have the capacity to play an important part. Indeed, in most cases, this will most likely be activities taking part on the local level. For instance, two such programmes are in place in the city of Aarhus in Denmark and in Berlin in Germany. These existing approaches provide other cities with experience to learn from.

a. The so-called Aarhus model of dealing with the problem has often been highlighted as a way for cities to work against radicalisation and extremism.¹¹ This approach focuses on inclusion; provided an individual has done nothing criminal, the authorities will help them to find a way back to the community. However, it is important to keep in mind the importance of the local context for preventive work to be successful. What works best may well be different in different cities. Local governments know their own city best.

b. The European Commission's strategy of "Countering violent extremism" (CVE) reflects the growing international focus on preventive approaches to transnational violence.¹² CVE is broader than only violent Islamism or IS-related manifestations of violence. It addresses all forms of violent extremism, regardless of ideology, and focuses not on radical thought or speech but instead on preventing violent attacks.

III. SECURITY AND SAFETY AS FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

16. In its Recommendation 80 (2000) on crime and urban insecurity in Europe, the Congress has noted that local authorities have a key role to play in crime prevention and reduction and that, accordingly, national authorities should strengthen local government responsibilities and resources allocated to local authorities to this effect.

17. In 2006, the Congress adopted a second recommendation (Recommendation 197) on urban security in Europe, where it is underlined that urban security requires involving numerous multidisciplinary areas and specialities relating not just to the police and the judiciary, but also to other sectors of the administration and the social sphere. It also invited member States to "guarantee the security of their citizens while fully upholding human rights and fundamental freedoms".¹³

18. Security policies should be designed and constructed around the individual and collective needs of citizens, and not according to public institutions. To do this, citizen participation must be universally promoted and civil society must play a role at all stages. Bringing together all forces necessary to address the problems in their complexity is an essential part of this approach. In order to maximise efficiency, it is necessary to emphasise the importance of partnership. Equally important is the need to analyse problems in their complexity, evaluate and make use of evidence-based remedies. All policy should take into account the latest technical and scientific knowledge.

19. With respect to urban security, a multi-level governance approach is needed for developing, implementing and raising awareness of security measures. Although the definition of security strategies is a national level competence, local authorities can also play a crucial role in tackling the dilemma of "security versus freedom" because of their proximity to citizens; they can act as interfaces. They can work to achieve social cohesion and avoid conflicts exploding into violence by promoting citizen participation and dialogue among communities.

IV. MULTIAGENCY STRATEGIES: PARTNERS IN MAKING THIS WORK

20. Cities must have an overview (by identifying and mobilising the existing structures) of who can help to understand the issues in their domain in order to create functioning partnerships – we can call this a coalition of the willing – and to involve new actors such as citizens, NGOs, religious community leaders, families, youth, schools, internet bloggers, social workers etc. Local authorities can do more to form local partnerships and work together on this issue and, for example in the case of Islamist radicalisation, create a common framework of values with Muslim organisations.

11 http://cir.au.dk/fileadmin/site_files/filer_statskundskab/subsites/cir/radicalization_aarhus_FINAL.pdf

12 http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-18_en.htm

13 <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=983773&Site=Congress>

21. There are a number of promising local initiatives (Copenhagen, Aarhus, Berlin, London, Vilvoorde, Brussels to name a few) dealing with radicalisation that other cities can learn from.

22. For instance, the *Hayat* project (Arabic and Turkish for 'life') located in Berlin run by the Centre for Democratic Culture (ZDK GmbH), focuses on advice and support to individuals and families at risk of violent Islamist extremism.¹⁴ The project has four full-time employees, in addition to a number of people in the field working on an hourly basis. The project staff includes psychologists, criminologists and Islamologists.

23. An increasing part of their work has come to focus on family support to people who have travelled or intend to travel to Syria to fight for an al-Qaeda-inspired group. Their operations are state-funded by the federal office for migration and asylum seekers (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge*, BAMF). One purpose of the program is to empower relatives to better manage radicalisation within their own family. Their experience shows that there is often a conflict within the family that needs to be overcome before any support for de-radicalisation of the person in question can begin in a meaningful way. The project will thus also be a link between civil society and security authorities. In the spring of 2015, they had about 130 cases, 50 of which are completed and 21 are designated as clearly successful because of the support given. In only one case has the development has gone in the wrong direction after the counselling started.

24. A good resource for cities is EU's Radicalisation Awareness Network, linking practitioners all over Europe to share experiences and learn from each other. The network contains a growing collection of practices where initiatives against radicalisation are located and serve as a useful resource for cities.¹⁵ The collection of practices includes projects on the following topics:

- a. awareness raising of first line practitioners;
- b. exit strategies: de-radicalisation and disengagement;
- c. bridging gaps through dialogue;
- d. community engagement and empowerment;
- e. educating young people;
- f. supporting and empowering families;
- g. delivering counter-communication;
- h. creating an institutional infrastructure.

V. ACTION ON THE GROUND: WHAT CAN LOCAL AUTHORITIES DO?

25. As regards preventive measures, there exists a mosaic of interventions to tackle radicalisation that are available to local authorities, some of which are presented below. It is important for cities to keep developing in this area regardless of specific legislation in this regard.

a. Designing holistic local multi-agency strategies: On the local level, cities need to develop a plan of action (local mapping of the situation, determining lines of action and setting up coordinating bodies) as well as allocating resources to combat radicalisation, and take concrete measures that can be followed up, also coordinating with different levels of government. Concerning coordination and developing synergy effects among participating parties, a previous recommendation from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities stresses that "it is essential that data, information and thinking about urban security can be pooled in a common reservoir such that knowledge is enhanced and decision-making facilitated."¹⁶

b. Raising awareness among stakeholders: It is important to raise awareness among stakeholders for a local safety partnership and provide adequate training to the different actors. For instance, one such group of actors is the frontline practitioners working with individuals or groups at risk. Other groups may include prison staff, social workers, teachers, and healthcare workers. Such training would help developing their understanding of the process of radicalisation and how to respond to it.

c. Raising awareness among local authorities on existing good practice: Some local authorities may fear that they are not equipped thoroughly to deal with the situation or that radicalisation is not their priority. They need to be shown that information and knowledge is available and that many European cities have significant experience of projects fostering democratic values which can serve as a good resource in the battle against extremism.

¹⁴ <http://hayat-deutschland.de/english/>

¹⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-best-practices/index_en.htm

¹⁶ Recommendation 197 (2006) on urban security in Europe <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=983773&Site=Congress>

d. Education: The important role of education should be underlined, especially regarding families and schools. It has often been said that families have a unique possibility to detect radicalisation, but in order to act on it and confront it in a productive way, families often need information and support. Education towards youth on broad topics such as tolerance, the respect of others and human rights are also important. Schools have a role to play concerning building resilience and prevention of radicalisation regardless of ideology. Young people are particularly vulnerable to discourses inciting to hate and violence since they are in a formative period, involving a struggle forming their identity. Such identity crises can be used by recruiters for extremist groups skilled in providing youths with clear, black and white answers to life's problems. On the other hand, vulnerable though they may be, young people are also strong allies in combating manifestations of hate, as is shown by their active participation through the social media for the Council of Europe No Hate Speech campaign.

e. Communication of strategies and actions towards the general public should be well-balanced, responsible and, in general, an integrating discourse should be privileged. At the same time, communication should not be too sensitive to call a spade a spade. A fine balance is required between keeping a clear message without stigmatising specific groups.

f. Supporting exit programs for individuals willing to leave extremism, especially religious oriented extremism. Such programs can play a key role in the process and can often benefit from being run locally. Local governments can help to set up and/or allocate resources to establish such programs.

g. Civil society has an important role to play in the work against radicalisation and extremism in all its manifestations, including hate speech, anti-Semitism and islamophobia by fostering social cohesion and a sense of belonging to the society. This can be manifested in many different ways, for instance by the work of NGOs, religious communities, and on the individual level by former extremists. Concerning Islamist extremism, Muslim leaders and communities are well situated to take an active role. Some have already done so but too many have been quiet or not done enough when young people have turned to extremism. Muslim communities are a vital partner in the preventive work and cities need to establish good connections and encourage their preventive work. In the case of radical mosques, cities need to be able to put pressure and speak clearly regarding values of freedom and democracy.

h. Financing of the proposed measures: In many cases, this is determined by local authorities, who have the responsibility to decide what budget to allocate. It is important not to view preventive work as a quick fix but rather these issues need to become ordinary budget items with stable long term finance.

i. Financing and seeking local partners: Transparency in local authority dealings with ethnic or religious associations when granting them financial support is important. Local authorities should be careful not to build alliances with the wrong partners but with credible ones and should strive for well-established routines for transparency concerning how allocated resources are spent. There may be circumstances where cities have difficulties handling the situation themselves. In these cases, it will be useful to get help from the regional or even national level.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

26. The alarming number of European foreign fighters in Syria, the terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen, as well as the threat from right - wing extremism, are all warning signs that cities need better and more effective preventive work to steer people at risk away from extremism. Unlike legislation, which in most cases is an issue on the national level, the area of prevention is in general a local one and to a large extent for the cities themselves to shape and master. This is, as noted above, their area *par excellence*.

27. There are already a number of cities in Europe that have taken these warning signs seriously and have responded by working structurally to prevent radicalisation leading to violent extremism. These cities have built knowledge and structure that other cities can draw from, and tailor to their specific needs based on local dynamics. There is also excellent knowledge available, for example, through the EU's Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) including a collection of practices of projects available for other cities to learn, and find inspiration, from and information on urban security from the European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS).

28. Local governments will need the support and partnership from families, religious communities and other important actors in civil society in order to build local resilience and effective preventive work. For such partnerships to start and take form, local authorities will need to take the initiative in seeking credible local partners. The Congress had already highlighted this point in an earlier recommendation by: "stressing the

vital role of local and regional authorities in organising a new partnership for urban security involving all the social players (population groups and citizens) and security professionals (the police and the judiciary) with a view to establishing an effective, democratic and integrated system of local policing.”¹⁷

29. Many cities in Europe will likely be facing the problem of radicalisation and violent extremism for many years to come. When the problem is long-term, the solutions also need to be long-term. Last-minute approaches will most likely be both more costly and less effective compared to well thought-out structured preventive work.

30. Filling this role is very much up to the cities of Europe and local governments, the importance of taking on this task successfully can hardly be overestimated.

¹⁷ Recommendation 216 (2007) on Community policing: local and regional authorities guaranteeing a new partnership.
<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1123875&Site=Congress>