

ACTIVITY REPORT

(Mid-October 2019 – June 2020)



Communication by the Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

1380bis meeting of the Ministers' Deputies
8 July 2020

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Activity Report of the Congress

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Communication by Andreas KIEFER, Acting Secretary General of the Congress

This activity report is an overview of the work of the Congress since 23 October 2019 and it covers the autumn session 2019 and key areas of the Congress' work since then.

This report was published on 8 July 2020, on the occasion of the presentation by the Acting Secretary General of the Congress to the Committee of Ministers' Deputies at their 1380bis meeting (see the oral communication below).

Dear Ambassadors,

This activity report covers a longer period than usual, as my last communication to this Committee dates back to 23 October 2019.

In my oral presentation I will not come back to all the aspects of the Congress work in this period but focus on the following:

- Lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis
- Impact of COVID on Congress work and outlook to autumn
- Budgetary aspects
- The "CARTA MONITOR" data base and
- The Congress renewal process

The relevance of local and regional authorities in member states in responding to the COVID-19 crisis and lessons learned in order to respect the basic principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in extra-ordinary situations in cities and municipalities

Since February this year, in this severe sanitary, social and economic crisis in all member States, local and regional authorities found themselves at the frontline. They provided emergency services in their communities, took measures to contain the spread of the disease, ensured coordination with other levels of government and other partners, and cooperated across borders, to ensure care for those affected and to secure protection and human rights for all. And they continue to do so. And they will also be key actors in bolstering the economic recovery and social revival in member States.

The Congress leaders were very pleased that this key role has been recognised by heads of governments, the Chair of the CM, the Secretary General and that the Council of Europe is aware of the role and contributions, which local and regional authorities – via the Congress – can make for the Organisation. If human rights, democracy and the rule of law are not achieved in municipalities, cities and regions, they will not be achieved at national level either.

Quick action – to support local actors

In order to provide a swift response to the need for exchange of experience and good practice, the Congress established an online platform showcasing the action by local and regional authorities during the pandemic. The portal with the web-address and a treasure of examples is reproduced as Appendix 3 to the activity report.

Institutional support at Council of Europe - and member state level

When cities and regions were included from Day 1 in the national inter-ministerial task forces and emergency response structures, when pragmatic, inclusive and capacity-oriented approaches were applied, they delivered in the best possible ways for the benefit of the people. And there are many positive examples in our member states to draw lessons from.

On the basis of discussions in its Committees in September and its Session in October, the Congress will formulate concrete recommendations to member States' governments, parliaments and local and regional authorities.

It will also contribute to the Declaration to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers in Athens in November 2020.

Let me mention some encouraging examples for the acknowledgement of mayors, coming from previous, the current and future chairmanship countries:

In France

On 25 June 2020, the French Senate adopted a resolution for "a new era of decentralisation" in which, referring to the European Charter of Local Self-Government of the Council of Europe, it affirms the fundamental place of the municipality as a basic cell of the territorial organisation, close to the needs of populations, and the first level of democratic life.

Georgia and Greece: National associations were closely involved in emergency planning and action.

In Germany

Speaking in the Bundesrat on 3 July 2020, Chancellor Angela Merkel laid out the priorities of Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. She said: "Together, we – the federal government, the federal states, our towns, cities and local authorities – can push ahead with Europe's recovery." This inclusive approach and spirit of multi-level governance will be – as we in the Congress trust - also the spirit of the German presidency in the Council of Europe (November 2020-May 2021).

The Congress will also include the multi-level governance approach in its priorities for the next mandate (2021 – 2026). These priorities will also contain proposals to strengthen the role of the Council of Europe's tools and instruments with respect to the environment and thus enhance the role of the organisation in supporting member states in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This is fully in line with Joint Declaration on human rights and the environment adopted by the Georgian, Greek and German Presidencies of the Committee of Ministers.

COVID-19: adapting the functioning of the Congress

After cancelling the March Session, immediate steps to ensure business continuity of the Congress bodies and of the secretariat were taken and working methods were adapted. During the entire containment period, the Congress and its secretariat remained operational and worked remotely via teleworking and video conferences.

Monitoring visits to the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Albania, Azerbaijan and Ireland have been postponed, as it is the case for the post-monitoring visit to the Republic of Moldova. Monitoring visits to Spain and Germany, originally on the work programme of 2020, may have to be carried out in 2021.

The Congress mission to observe the local elections in Serbia in June also had to be cancelled. With regard to election observation missions to Bosnia and Herzegovina and to Ukraine in autumn, the Congress will consider the deployment of delegations in close contact with the respective authorities, taking into account the sanitary situation.

Between April and June, a series of webinars was organised for the youth delegates and they will resume in September.

The co-operation activities in Ukraine, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in Tunisia and Morocco were continued electronically (details can be found in the activity report).

All these remote activities can, of course, not replace the in-person meetings which characterise a political body, meant to discuss, to negotiate, to exchange and to establish relations and trust. The members of the Congress are eager to return to in-person meetings, as soon as the circumstances allow. The committee meetings planned in September will be remote and this experiences from video-meetings will be very useful and be included in further reflections about our working methods.

For the time being the autumn session is scheduled in Strasbourg from 26 – 29 October 2020. According to the sanitary situation by then, it may become a virtual meeting. The decision will be taken after the summer break and safety and security will be the guiding principles.

Aspects of the working conditions and concrete requests and proposals to improve

Budget: use savings for investments

In close co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Europe Major Administrative Entities concerned, the Congress contributed to the development of IT tools for remote meetings. In fact, the first KUDO meeting with interpretation was organised for the Congress on 6 April 2020 and we all have made substantial progress in using and developing these video-conferencing facilities since then.

A part of the savings of the cancelled session is being used for investment in videoconferencing infrastructure for certain meetings. These investments will serve the whole Organisation.

The Congress is trying to implement as much of the work programme as possible, but it will not be able to fully catch up. Some of the cancelled activities – meetings, conferences, monitoring missions etc. – can be postponed or carried over to 2021, some can be replaced by video conferences. The bi-annual budget of the Organisation can provide the necessary flexibility in this extraordinary situation.

Human resources

On 9 June 2020 the Congress Bureau held an exchange of views with Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić. Members referred to the very difficult budgetary and staffing situation of the Congress, which they had already expressed in September 2019.

The Bureau declaration adopted in September 2019 in this regard was understood by the Committee of Ministers as a call for help, but only the interpretation into the working languages were addressed with a temporary solution. The main question, the extremely un-proportional share of the Congress in carrying the burden, is still unresolved. To recall: in the course of the cuts in 2018, the Council of Europe budget shrunk by 6 percent and the one of the Congress by 12.1 percent: this is twice as much.

The Congress Bureau considers, that a “fair burden sharing” is still due to be achieved. The request is based on serious concerns about the loss of critical mass of the Congress secretariat. The Congress President mentioned this in his exchange of view on 26 February 2020.

Secondments – an indispensable support

The Congress is very grateful that three member states support the secretariat in this difficult time by seconding persons and hopes this will continue also in 2021. I would like to thank Iceland, Turkey and Ukraine for their invaluable support.

At the same time, I would like to invite other member states to consider seconding staff to the Congress secretariat. We are in urgent need to strengthen the secretariats of the committees to catch up with the work programme as far as possible.

The growing backlog in monitoring visits is of major concern in this context. Even before the COVID-19 crisis we had a significant backlog – due to the staff and budget cuts in recent years: On 1 January 2019 we had 13 countries not monitored within the scheduled five year period, on 1 January 2020 the number rose to 22 countries, that is 47.8 percent of all member states. While reducing and cutting many activities, it was not possible to compensate the cuts without putting in danger the core business of the Congress.

The Congress needs the attention and help of the Committee of Ministers, so that it can continue to perform and deliver on its mandate.

Selected aspects of the work programme of the Congress committees

A new online tool, called CARTA-MONITOR, was launched at the 37th session of the Congress in October 2019. This inter-active database presents the findings of the Monitoring reports on the application of the provisions of the [European Charter of Local Self-Government graphically](#). It allows to consult the analysis, article-by-article and paragraph-by-paragraph, made during the monitoring missions, as well as to make comparative analyses of several provisions and countries (The portal and the link are reproduced in Appendix 3 of the activity report).

Reports under preparation by the committees

Local and regional elections in extreme crisis situations

Recurring issues from monitoring and observing elections

Sexism and gender-based violence in politics at local and regional level

Hate speech and physical violence against local / regional politicians

Youth work

Cultural heritage as a tool for local and regional development (also: promoting the EPA Cultural Routes)

Situation of LGBTi+ persons in the age of increasing homophobia

Status of capital cities

Developing rural – urban interplay (supported by an EU funded research project)

Digital economy and local budgets (home sharing platforms)

Horizontal co-operation with other Council of Europe partners continues on

- Roma and travelers
- Radicalisation
- Children's rights
- Artificial intelligence
- World Forum for Democracy
- Electoral matters with Venice Commission

The upcoming renewal of delegations

On behalf of the Congress I would like to thank the Committee of Ministers for having agreed to extend the Congress mandate for six months, in order to give national, regional and local authorities more time for the renewal procedure under the revised Charter. The changes for the renewal of delegations concern mainly the distribution of seats between Chambers and that countries without regions do not need to nominate members of the Chamber of Regions (without voting rights).

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe will send a letter to all Ministers at the end of the summer and the Permanent Representations will receive electronic versions of the forms to be filled in by 31 December 2020. As in the past, we can expect that the Permanent Representations will be contacted by capitals on the criteria – gender balance, reflection of results of local and regional elections, geographical distribution - and the domestic procedure of consultation. The colleagues in the Congress secretariat will be happy to provide information and guidance. The Congress Bureau will examine the proposed delegations in their first meeting in 2021, so that the future members can be invited to the renewal Session from 23 – 25 March 2021 in time.

Equally important, the timely nomination is also a precondition for those members, who want to stand for elections to the Bureau, the Committees or as spokespersons. The political groups coordinate these candidatures well in advance, in order to achieve a fair distribution among national delegations and to achieve a gender balance. So, candidatures are more likely to be successful, if presented at an early stage. We are looking forward to receiving proposals for gender balanced delegations with active local and regional elected politicians, who are willing to get actively involved in the work of the Congress and of the Council of Europe.

I. POLITICAL AGENDA

HIGHLIGHTS

Strasbourg, 29 October 2019

Granting of Partner for Local Democracy status to Tunisia

In a resolution adopted during the 37th session, the Tunisian Republic was granted Partner for Local Democracy status with the Congress (see VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS).

Strasbourg, 27 November 2019

Ratification of the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority by Georgia

Gunn Marit HELGESEN (Norway, EPP/CCE), First Vice-President of the Congress and President of the Chamber of Regions, participated in the ceremony of ratification of the Additional Protocol by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia David ZALKALIANI, in the presence of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. She welcomed this ratification which is part of the Congress' post-monitoring dialogue with the Georgian authorities and follows the adoption by the Congress of a recommendation on the situation of local and regional democracy in Georgia, in November 2018. The Protocol entered into force for Georgia on 1 March 2020.

Strasbourg, 27 November 2019

Congress contribution to the Georgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers

Gunn Marit HELGESEN participated in the handover meeting from France to Georgia of the Committee of Ministers in the presence of representatives of the Council of Europe 47 member States. She welcomed the Georgian Presidency's emphasis on the local and regional dimension as well as on legal instruments, such as the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority. The Congress closely follows the priority areas of the Chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers which are of particular interest to local and regional authorities.

Strasbourg, 9 December 2019

Meeting of the Secretary General with the Minister for local government and transport of Iceland

Minister Sigurður Ingi JÓHANNSSON referred to the latest monitoring report of the Congress which contained very useful recommendations in further implementing the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Iceland. The on-going reform in the country includes a voluntary merger of municipalities while maintaining the role and democratic accountability of the local councillors and mayors to the population they represent. In view of the upcoming Icelandic chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers in November 2022, the Secretary General of the Congress Andreas KIEFER informed the Minister about the different options of contributions of the Congress to the preparation of the Icelandic priorities.

Strasbourg, 10 December 2019

Statement by the Congress President on Human Rights Day

The President of the Congress Anders KNAPE stated on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2019 that the elected representatives of local and regional authorities are the guarantors of fundamental freedoms and human rights for citizens, with a real responsibility to ensure that they are respected and implemented in the territories. He underlined that this essential role of local and regional elected representatives is widely recognised, as evidenced by the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, with numerous judgments including a territorial dimension, dealing with freedom of assembly, policing, the right to vote, freedom of expression, the environment and minority rights. He concluded by stressing that the awareness-raising campaign on the specific role of local and regional authorities in ensuring the implementation of human rights as close as possible to citizens has been the Congress' commitment for several years, in particular during its missions to monitor the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and through the preparation of a series of manuals for local and regional elected representatives on the implementation of human rights.

Strasbourg, 13 January 2020

Death of former President Lucien SERGENT

The former President of the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe from 1991 to 1992 (predecessor of the Congress) and mayor of Etréchy (France) for 30 years, passed away at the age of one hundred and one. Anders KNAPE conveyed the condolences to Mr. SERGENT'S family and praised "his commitment and determination, that greatly benefited the Congress as it stands now". The President also underlined that Mr. SERGENT, founding father of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), was a fervent defender of local and regional democracy and a believer in the European Project who was convinced that education plays an essential role in bringing citizens together and teaching them to respect their differences.

Strasbourg, 22 January 2020

Declaration by the Congress rapporteur on Roma issues

John WARMISHAM (United Kingdom, SOC/G/PD), Congress rapporteur on Roma issues, welcomed the adoption by the Committee of Ministers of the Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion 2020-2025 to combat anti-Gypsyism and discrimination and to support equality. The plan also fosters democratic participation, promotes public trust and accountability and supports access to inclusive quality education and training. The Rapporteur underlined that the work of the Congress in favour of the integration of Roma and Travellers and their protection against discrimination and violent attacks is fully in line with this Action Plan which highlights the need to strengthen the capacity of local and regional authorities, who are at the forefront of providing solutions on the ground.

Strasbourg, 30 January 2020

Meeting of the Secretary General with the Public Defender of Georgia

The Public Defender of Georgia, Nino LOMJARIA, underlined that local authorities have a shared responsibility in protecting and implementing human rights in their communities. She stressed that there is a need to strengthen their capacity to deliver and address the priorities put forward by the citizens in particular in terms of social and economic rights as well as the right to a healthy environment. The Secretary General informed the Public Defender about the work of the Congress, in particular the latest monitoring report which includes recommendations to further strengthening the position of local government in Georgia, as well as the 2nd volume of the Human Rights Handbook which is currently being finalised and will focus on social rights. Mr KIEFER also referred to a potential project on "Strengthening democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia" that the Congress could implement in co-operation with NALAG and the Public Defender's Office as part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023.

Strasbourg, 30 January 2020

Meeting of the Secretary General of the Congress with the Secretary General of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly

The Secretary General of the Congress and Dmitry KOBITSKIY, Secretary General of the Interparliamentary Assembly (IPA) of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) exchanged views on further co-operation between the Congress and the IPA, in the light of the Memorandum of Intent signed in 2009. Dmitry KOBITSKIY presented the IPA's work in elaborating model laws on local self-government in areas such as municipal public services or the privatisation of municipal property, as well as the IPA's approach to cross-border co-operation, in particular for road construction and maintenance, water resources and the environment. These are all subjects on which the IPA is interested to benefit from the expertise of the Congress. The Secretary General stressed that several aspects of the work of the Congress represent a strong potential for cooperation with the IPA, including its Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, as well as a wide range of co-operation activities carried out in the field and thematic activities related to the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations Agenda 2030.

Tirana, 4 to 6 February 2020

High-level visit to Albania

At the centre of this Congress delegation visit was the situation of grassroots democracy in the country, in particular the developments since the last local elections held in June 2019. The delegation was composed of the President of the Congress, the Presidents of the two Chambers, as well as the

Secretary General. The programme included meetings with the President of the Republic of Albania, the Deputy Minister of Interior, the Mayor of Tirana and Head of the Albanian Delegation to the Congress, and with the Chair of the Central Election Commission of Albania. In addition, meetings were held with the Prime Minister and Chairman of the Socialist Party of Albania, and with the Chairman of the Democratic Party of Albania. The delegation also exchanged views with representatives from Shkoder, notably the Mayor of the city, and the President of the Regional Council of Shkoder. Meetings with representatives of the diplomatic corps in Tirana, international and domestic NGOs and territorial self-government associations as well as with the People's Advocate completed the program.

Referring to the unsatisfactory situation that followed the local elections of last year, the Congress President recapitulated the need for Albania to pursue the reform course. He underlined that the Congress will continue to support Albania in its efforts to consolidate territorial self-government by means of benchmarking and targeted co-operation. He stressed that the strengthening of consultation between the central government and the local level and the fight against corruption are of specific importance for the Congress in this respect.

Strasbourg, 6 February 2020

Call for inclusive consultation in the territorial reform process in Ukraine by the President of the Congress

On the occasion of the appointment of Denys SHMYGAL to the post of Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Community and Territorial Development of Ukraine, Anders KNAPE addressed a letter to the new Minister, reaffirming the Congress' support for the ongoing territorial and decentralisation reforms in Ukraine. He stated that substantial legislative and constitutional changes are needed in Ukraine to finalise the ongoing decentralisation and reform of local self-government. He also stressed that, in order to be effective and sustainable, all elements of the reform must be prepared and implemented in consultation with all stakeholders. This process and the results to be achieved must be based on the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and its additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority, as well as other Council of Europe instruments.

Georgia, 22 to 25 February 2020

Official visit of the President

Anders KNAPE welcomed the continued commitment of Georgia to decentralisation, in line with the post-monitoring dialogue in 2014, the signature of the road map of the Congress in 2015 and the latest Congress recommendation. He welcomed in particular the recent adoption of the decentralisation strategy by the Georgian government in line with the Congress' recommendations. The President said the strategy would lay the ground for quality local democracy in the country. The official visit was organised with the support of the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) and its Vice-President Tamar TALIASHVILI (Georgia, SOC/G/PD), Vice-President of the Congress and vice-chair of the Georgian delegation. The President held a series of meetings with representatives of the central and the local authorities in particular with the Vice-Premier and Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Deputy Chairman of the Parliament as well as the Mayor of Tbilisi, the Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and member of the Parliament of Georgia, the Public Defender and members of the Georgian delegation to the Congress. These meetings provided an overview on the situation of reforms and local and regional authorities in the country.

The President also attended the signature ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding on Promotion of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe Programme between the Georgian Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport and NALAG where he reiterated the support of the Congress to all initiatives by central authorities which take into account the contribution of local authorities and promote the values of the Council of Europe: cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and trans frontier exchanges. He stressed that developing cultural routes was essential to build a European landscape of common values where relations are built on trust not only between countries, but also between cities and regions.

The President visited the Administrative border line with South Ossetia near the city of Gori in the presence of the Governor of the Shida Kartli Region and the Mayor of Gori Municipality among others. He had an exchange with local people about the difficulties they face in their everyday live due to the political and security situation in the region.

Strasbourg, 26 February 2020

Exchange of views by the President with the Committee of Ministers

The President invited member States to make the most of the experience and commitment of local and regional elected representatives on the ground underlining that they form a vast network, a distribution chain to promote the Council of Europe's legal instruments and policies, respect for human rights, the defence of democracy and the rule of law throughout Europe.

The President presented the key areas identified for the future priorities of the Congress for the period 2021-2026 stressing that the Congress priorities will be in line with those set by the Council of Europe as well as with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations Agenda 2030. He said that using its statutory means and tools - plenary sessions, work programme of the Chambers and Committees, monitoring, election observation - and its co-operation activities on the ground, the Congress will continue to design responses that will help local and regional elected representatives to meet the major challenges they face including also with practical tools, such as its series of brochures on ethics and transparency or its manuals on human rights at local level.

POLITICAL STATEMENTS

Turkey

Arrest of the Mayor of Urla District – 18 December 2019

The President declared that the mayor of Urla district in Izmir District, Burak OĞUZ, was elected following the expression of the will of the Turkish people in the local elections of 31 March 2019, which were observed by the Congress and his arrest on 17 December by the Turkish authorities revives the concern about such practices, already expressed earlier this year.

The Congress has consistently expressed its concern about the excessive recourse to judicial proceedings against local elected officials in Turkey and their replacement by appointed officials which seriously undermines the democratic choice of Turkish citizens and the proper functioning of local democracy in Turkey.

Continued suspensions of mayors in the south-east of Turkey – 18 May 2020

In reaction to reports about further suspensions of mayors in the southeast of Turkey, the President expressed his concern regarding the ongoing undermining of local self-government in the country. Stressing that even during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has hit Turkey very hard, there have been reports about ongoing suspensions of elected mayors in communities in the south-east of the country, he said that excessive use of legal proceedings against local elected representatives and their replacement by state appointed officials is not only an affront to those who stand up for free and fair elections, it is also a serious and permanent threat to the proper functioning of local democracy in Turkey.

Venice Commission opinion on removal of local candidates and mayors in Turkey – 19 June 2020

Congress spokespersons on local and regional elections Jakob WIENEN (NETHERLANDS, EPP/CCE) and Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, ILDG) expressed strong support for the legal opinion on the replacement of elected candidates and mayors in Turkey adopted by the Venice Commission. This opinion responds to a request sent by the Congress, concerning several decisions made by the Turkish State authorities after the 31 March local elections and follows the Congress election observation report which had identified serious concerns regarding the situation of local elected representatives. This report stressed that the continued suspensions of elected local officials without court decisions and their replacements by Government's appointees were inconsistent with the basic principles of democracy and in contradiction to international law standards, including the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by Turkey in 1992

Latvia

Worrying developments of the current territorial reform in Latvia. – 28 May 2020

Following the information received by the Latvian Association of local and regional governments regarding worrying developments of the current territorial reform, the President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, Xavier CADORET (France, SOC/G/PD), expressed concern, on the acceleration of the implementation process of the reform, particularly in the light of the continued COVID-19 crisis. The deterioration of the general situation of local democracy in the Republic of Latvia since the last Congress monitoring report of 2018, against the backdrop of the ongoing territorial reform, was the focus of a fact-finding mission and the corresponding report adopted by the Monitoring Committee on 11 February 2020. He called on the Latvian authorities, and in particular the Minister for Environmental Protection and Regional Development, to suspend the implementation of this reform pending a review of the process.

Further development of local democracy in Latvia – 19 June 2020

In reaction to the recent enactment of the administrative territorial reform by the Saeima, the Congress rapporteurs on Latvia, Xavier CADORET, and Marc COOLS (Belgium, ILDG) expressed disappointment and concern about the further development of local democracy in the country. The rapporteurs regret that the Minister for Environmental Protection and Regional Development of Latvia did not seize the opportunity to hold a dialogue with the municipalities and their Association to respect their right to be heard on such an important matter as the territorial reform, as required by the Congress Charter.

Others

Local elections to be held on 21 June in Serbia – 11 June 2020

Taking note of the fact that the Republic Electoral Commission of Serbia had resumed preparations for local elections rescheduled for 21 June, the President expressed his confidence in the state authorities to organise democratic elections, despite the ongoing COVID19 crisis. While recognising that holding elections in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic poses significant challenges to ensuring the health of voters and poll workers, the Congress stresses the critical role of upholding the basic democratic rights to vote and to get elected at the local and regional levels. He said that health protection measures, such as social distancing or special voting arrangements for vulnerable people, need to be in balance with the key principles of democratic elections, primarily universal, equal, free and secret suffrage.

Significant developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina – 18 June 2020

Welcoming the signatures between party leaders Bakir IZETBEGOVIĆ (SDA) and Dragan ČOVIĆ (HDZ) of two agreements aimed at reinstating free and democratic suffrage in Mostar, the President underlined that since the October 2017 Congress Session, where the Reflection Group on Mostar, in association with the European Union's Committee of the Regions, was created, the Congress has been working tirelessly to address the political impasse in the city. The Congress has issued several recommendations and statements highlighting the importance of reinstating local democracy in Mostar

FOCUS

The president has had video conferences with local and national politicians in Sweden and other countries. He notably had a videoconference with the mayor of Istanbul Ekrem İMAMOĞLU. They exchanged on the latest developments and the measures taken in Europe and in Istanbul in particular, strongly affected by the virus, stressing the importance of sharing experiences and cooperation between municipalities in order to draw the right conclusions for the future. The President recalled that the fight against COVID-19 also posed many risks for human rights and democracy in cities and regions. He said dealing with the economic consequences was certainly the most crucial problem, but other challenges such as democratic functioning at all levels of government, protecting fundamental rights and freedoms and safeguarding the rule of law in Council of Europe member states must not be forgotten.

One outcome of this exchange was the publication on the Congress hub of an overall information on the situation in Istanbul.

The President also participated in the high-level videoconference organised by the Greek Chairmanship on the "Protection of human life and public health in the context of a pandemic on 3 June 2020 where he said that the priority in the coming months for all levels of government will be to join forces in order to overcome the sanitary crisis and its devastating consequences on our societies, to help the citizens and prepare for the aftermath.

- **The Secretariat of the Congress**

During the entire containment period, the Congress secretariat remained operational and worked remotely via teleworking.

Meetings were held with the Secretaries of the 47 national delegations on 30 April and 4 June 2020.

As part of its "Rejuvenate Politics" initiative, the Congress has set up a series of webinars in which the young delegates of the 2020 edition participated. These webinars were mainly devoted to presenting the activities and work of the Congress. The cycle will resume in September with themes such as Local Democracy Week and the participation of young people at local level, in particular through the presentation of the European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life. This intensive program aims to prepare young delegates to participate actively in committee meetings in September and in the 39th session of the Congress in October, during which they will present their projects in relation to the theme of the session.

A knowledge hub for partners' actions was created on the Congress website to showcase and share the concrete responses to the COVID-19 situation brought by networks and associations of municipalities, cities and regions such as:

- the Action Plan and an exchange platform by the European Committee of the Regions
- the experience-sharing campaign by the Global Parliament of Mayors
- the repository of specific cases in cross-border areas by the Association of European Border Regions
- the webinar platform by Eurocities to help access EU funding
- an online market engagement by ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability to connect health sector procurers and medical supply providers
- and numerous dedicated web sections, hubs and blogs
(see APPENDIX 3).

On July 2020, a webinar on "Preventing and Combating Sexism at the Local Level in Ukraine" was organised to launch a Guide for Women and Men in Local Politics. The aim is to equip local political leaders in Ukraine with the knowledge necessary to recognise sexism in their institutions and administrations, and to take appropriate measures to address this issue. The guide will help also increase the political participation and representation of women at local and regional levels.

The webinar was organised in the context of the project "Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine", implemented by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021 (see VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS)

The Congress during the COVID-19 pandemic

- Activities of the Congress

Mid-March, due to the evolving situation of the Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak in many European countries, the President, together with the Presidents of the Chambers and the Congress Secretariat, decided to cancel its 38th Session planned for 17-19 March 2020, as well as the Bureau and other meetings due to take place during that week in Strasbourg.

Several steps to ensure the continuation of its activities were taken and working methods were reviewed by relying on digital tools

Bureau and Committees may adopt decisions by written procedure and, when urgent decisions are needed between meetings of the Bureau, the three Presidents can take them.

Monitoring visits to the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Albania Azerbaijan and Ireland have been postponed to autumn this year (depending on the travel conditions), as it is the case for the post-monitoring visit to the Republic of Moldova.

Monitoring visits to Spain and Germany, originally on the work programme of 2020, will be carried out in 2021.

Further to the postponement of the local elections in Serbia, the Congress mission was also cancelled. With regard to further possible election observation missions to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine, the Congress stands ready to consider the deployment of observation missions, pending on further decisions of the according authorities.

The Congress project “Strengthening Democracy and Building Local Confidence in Ukraine” continued to provide expert support to thirteen local Ukrainian authorities in the implementation of local initiatives on ethical, innovative and inclusive policies and practices. In order to take into account, the precautionary measures derived from the COVID-19 pandemic, national and international experts have undertaken remote coaching by means of videoconference calls and other teleworking tools (see VII. COOPERATION ACTIVITIES AND ACTION PLANS).

As part of its cooperation activities in Morocco, the Congress provided expert support for the development of the websites of two partner associations of elected representatives - the Association of Regions of Morocco (ARM) and the Moroccan Association of Council Presidents prefectural and provincial (AMPCPP). This activity, launched in March 2020, receives financial support from Norway in the framework of the Council of Europe Neighborhood Partnership with Morocco (2018-2021) (see VII. COOPERATION ACTIVITIES AND ACTION PLANS).

- Activity of the President of the Congress

In response to the crisis, the President called on 17 March 2020 for urgent coordinated action by all levels of government European, national, local and regional, as well as at the level of citizens in their respective communities. He also called for united efforts to support local and regional authorities which were in the front line. He expressed the Congress’ full support to the Secretary General’s guidance for governments during the COVID-19 crisis, stressing the need to ensure that the measures taken do not undermine Europe’s founding values and standards.

Preparing the aftermath

In its remote meeting on 9 June 2020, the Congress Bureau adopted a Declaration expressing its concern about the democratic self-governance and financial autonomy of local and regional authorities in Council of Europe member States, in particular in view of recovery plans in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. It highlights the fact that some governments have imposed measures with far-reaching consequences for fundamental rights and freedoms and the democratic functioning which have also impacted the sub-national level – in particular relocation of powers, increase of central states' surveillance, postponement of local and regional elections (voir II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES)

On 18 June 2020, the Chairs of the Monitoring Committee and of the Governance Committee took part in the thematic meeting on "A democratic governance response to COVID-19" organised by the CDDG, under the aegis of the Greek Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. They both presented their experience as local and regional elected representatives and underlined the global impact of the pandemic on local and regional authorities, in the light of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. They highlighted two issues to be dealt with in particular:

- the fact that central authorities in some Council of Europe member states have departed from their commitments under the Charter, by re-centralising local competences, reducing the margin of appreciation in the conduct of local affairs or reducing the financial autonomy of local authorities
- The organisation of local and regional elections in a period of crisis

In Autumn, the Congress is organising remote meetings of its three Committees. Between 15 and 17 September 2020, the monitoring, governance and current affairs Committees will hold exchanges of views and experiences regarding the management of the pandemic in Europe's cities and regions. Thematic debates will respectively focus on "Safeguarding the European Charter of Local Self-Government in extreme crisis situations" (monitoring), "The COVID-19 pandemic and challenges for multi-level governance" (governance) and "lessons learned during the COVID-19 outbreak for protecting minorities in cities and regions" (current affairs) involving also youth representatives and international experts.

On 28 September the Congress will hold a Bureau meeting in the morning and, in the afternoon, a meeting of its Statutory Forum. The Forum will be convened in order to approve some texts which were to be taken by the March session and, in particular to adopt specific rules with a view to preparing the 39th session potentially as a remote event. Whether this session, due to take place from 27-29 October, is maintained as an in-person event or is held over 5 days as a remote one, will depend on the sanitary situation after the summer.

The outcome of the thematic debates in the committee meetings and the session will feed the Congress priorities 2021-2026 which are currently under preparation and will be adopted during the March 2021 session.

These reflections will also serve as basis for the Congress contribution to the Athens ministerial meeting in November.

EVENT

70th anniversary of the Council of Europe

Strasbourg, 31 October 2019

At the ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe, the presidents of the Congress and its chambers, as well as political groups, recalled the fundamental values and achievements of the Council of Europe. In response to the crisis of confidence in democratic institutions, they underlined the role of the Congress in their implementation as a guarantor of territorial democracy within the Council of Europe. The year 2019 also marked the 25th anniversary of the Congress, which has been working for a quarter of a century "in favour of a better balance between local and regional governments and central governments".

Karl HEINZ LAMBERTZ (Belgium, SOC/G/PD), Vice-President of the Chamber of Regions, stressed the importance of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the cornerstone of the European democratic model. He called for the strengthening of the Congress' cooperation with other organisations and associations, in particular with the European Committee of the Regions (EU), in order to ensure that the principles of the Charter are implemented as closely as possible to local elected representatives and citizens.

Recalling the role of the Parliamentary Assembly in the institutionalisation of the Congress - and in particular the holding of the first session of the European Conference of Local Authorities in 1957 - Xavier CADORET, President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, called for closer cooperation between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress. He also stressed the added value of the Congress' cooperation with Mediterranean countries, in particular Morocco and Tunisia within the framework of the South-Mediterranean Partnership.

In addition, the 70th anniversary was an opportunity for the presidents of the Congress' political groups to discuss the challenges that threaten the Council of Europe's fundamental values. EPP Group President Bernd VOEHRINGER (Germany, EPP/CCE) stressed the need to implement in practice the Charter of Local Self-

Piero FASSINO, Chairman of the Group of Socialists, Green and Progressive democrats, and Marc COOLS, Chairman of the Independent and Liberal Democratic Group, called on the Committee of Ministers to give the Congress the means to carry out its tasks. The question of sufficient financial resources is also fundamental for local and regional authorities to fulfil their responsibilities in promoting citizen participation, ensuring access to services for all, guaranteeing the rights of minorities, integrating migrants, welcoming refugees, ensuring the environmental and cultural quality of cities among others.

Svetlana BOHATYRCHUK KRYVKO (Ukraine, ECR), President of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group, proposed that the concept of "democratic security" become a fundamental principle of the work of the Council of Europe and the Congress, which should not only address today's challenges, but also anticipate those of tomorrow in order to guarantee freedom and democracy in societies.

II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES

A. THE BUREAU

Strasbourg, 28 October 2019

Among the items on the agenda of this meeting, held on the eve of the 37th session, were the situation of local and regional democracy in Europe, particularly in Albania, Azerbaijan, as well as in Turkey following a monitoring visit carried out in this country from 1 to 3 October 2019. An agenda item also focused on the preliminary findings of the observation mission for local and regional elections in the Republic of Moldova (20 October 2019).

In addition, Bureau members discussed the South Mediterranean Partnership, including the granting of the status of Partner for Local Democracy to the Congress by the Republic of Tunisia during the 37th session. The terms of reference for the Congress's future priorities for 2021-2025 were also debated.

Strasbourg, 31 October 2019

At its brief meeting on the last day of the session, the Bureau members appointed new rapporteurs on the verification of new members' credentials and appointment procedures and a new Congress Adviser on Constitutional Matters and approved terms of reference for reports for consideration at the October 2020 session.

Paris, 3 February 2020

Following an in-camera examination, for approval, of the candidatures for the next election of the Secretary General of the Congress due to take place during the 38th session, the Bureau discussed the situation of local and regional democracy in Europe, in particular in Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It also discussed the draft agenda of the 38th Session and the Revision of the Congress Rules and Procedures

Other items discussed included the future priorities of the Congress for the period 2021-2025 and proposals for the award of the title of "Partner of the European Local Democracy Week".

Bureau decisions taken by written procedure, 28 April 2020

On 28 April 2020, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bureau, on the proposal of the Congress President and the presidents of the chambers, decided, by written procedure, to ask the Committee of Ministers to agree to extend the current mandate of Congress members until the spring session in 2021 (scheduled for 23-25 March 2021) and allow member States to submit proposals for the new Congress delegations by 31 December 2020. Due to the pandemic, local and regional elections had been postponed in several member States. The extension of the mandate of Congress members would allow member States' governments to consult with their national associations of local and regional authorities about the composition of the new Congress delegations in a manner compatible to the crisis which concerns all levels of government within the Council of Europe member States.

The Bureau also decided to postpone the elections of the vice-presidents of the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Secretary General to the 39th session scheduled for 27-29 October 2020.

Remote meeting, 9 June 2020

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bureau meeting was replaced by a remote meeting.

Members adopted the agenda for the 39th Session in October 2020, approved terms of reference for committee activities and the revised Administrative Rules, which would be sent to Congress members for consultation. They endorsed also a reflection document on local and regional elections in time of Corona, which will serve as basis to a report to be submitted to the Autumn session together with a debate on this subject.

The Bureau adopted a declaration expressing its concern about the democratic self-governance and financial autonomy of local and regional authorities in Council of Europe member States, in particular in view of recovery plans in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. It highlights the fact that some governments have imposed, within or outside the context of states of emergency, measures with far-reaching consequences for fundamental rights and freedoms and the democratic functioning which have also impacted the sub-national level - be it through relocation of powers, increase of central states' surveillance or postponement of local and regional elections(see APPENDIX 2).

While recognising the special tasks and responsibilities of central governments in crisis situations, the Bureau made specific reference to the basic principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Governance such as consultation and financial autonomy and urged the national authorities concerned to remove restrictions and restore democratic functioning at the local level, in full compliance with the Charter. Extraordinary measures must always be temporary only and under democratic control.

The meeting of the Bureau was followed by an exchange of views with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ. She presented, in particular, the guidelines prepared to assist the 47 member states in respecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law as they struggle with the COVID-19 crisis and highlighted the essential role of local and regional authorities in this regard.

B. THE SESSION

37th Session – 29-31 October 2019

Under the umbrella theme of “Mayors safeguarding democracy”, the Session’s debates focused on the working conditions of local elected representatives as well as smart cities and cybersecurity, culture without borders, the fair distribution of taxes in transfrontier areas, the use of languages by local and regional authorities and the protection of internally displaced persons, as well as on the regional dimension in the future of Europe and on the Venice Principles on the protection and promotion of the ombudsman institution. Members also considered the revision of the "Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making process" prepared by a joint working group composed of members of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe and the Congress.

As part of its monitoring activities, the Congress considered for adoption two reports on local and regional democracy in the Russian Federation in the presence of Sergei BYSTREVSII, Deputy Minister of Justice of the Russian Federation, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as a report on the observation of local elections in Turkey on 31 March 2019, including the repeat mayoral election in Istanbul on 23 June 2019.

The request for the status of Partner of Local Democracy to the Republic of Tunisia was examined and granted. This makes it the second country – together with the Kingdom of Morocco – to hold this status, which offers the Council of Europe’s neighboring countries a platform for dialogue and institutional contacts with their European counterparts. Mokhtar HAMMAMI, Minister for Local Affairs and the Environment, and Souad BEN ABDERRAHIM, Mayor of Tunis and President of the National Federation of Tunisian Cities (FNVT) addressed the Congress on this occasion (see VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS).

Youth delegates from 39 member States presented grass-roots projects undertaken with their local authorities. This initiative is part of the "Rejuvenating Politics" initiative, launched in 2014 by the Congress to encourage youth participation: youth delegates are invited to take part in debates during sessions and committee meetings.

In addition, a ceremony marked the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe, with the participation of the President of the Congress, the President of the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Vice-President of the Chamber of Regions, as well as the Presidents of the Congress' political groups (see I. POLITICAL AGENDA).

Speaking at the opening of the Session, the President of the Congress stressed that the Congress, which plays a key role in defending local democracy, must have resources corresponding to its responsibilities within the Council of Europe. He explained that the Congress was under increasing pressure from the member States who expect it to monitor local democracy, observe local and regional elections, but also to be a leading actor who is closer to the citizens in the face of many current challenges and therefore, it is necessary to return to a share of 3% of the Organisation's budget which would allow the Congress to continue the activities for which it is responsible within the Council of Europe.

Invited guests included Ivan MALENICA, Minister of Public Administration of the Republic of Croatia, and as part of the institutional dialogue, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ, as well as the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Liliane MAURY PASQUIER.

The Minister of Public Administration of Croatia underlined the fact that the European Charter of Local Self-Government is one of the key Council of Europe instruments that Croatia has ratified. He also

stressed the importance of new technologies for facilitating relations between citizens and the authorities and boosting transparency and presented the e-citizens system set up in Croatia. He explained that reform is an ongoing process in all areas of the public sector, including in the system of local and regional self-government and that Croatia was in the process of delegating central government functions to counties. He gave details of the project entitled “Optimisation of the local and regional self-government system” being conducted by the Ministry of Public Administration.

The Council of Europe Secretary General stated it was vital that the Council of Europe remains the benchmark for the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe. She stressed that the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress work side-by-side as guardians of these values in their respective areas of responsibility.

The President of the Parliamentary Assembly stated that democracy starts at local and regional level as it is implemented, promoted and safeguarded by the vital, day-to-day work of local and regional representatives and the complex challenges they face. She called for a coordinated approach between the Congress and the Assembly and mentioned gender equality - one of the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030 - among the possible common themes for cooperation.

C. THE CHAMBERS

Chamber of Local Authorities

During the 37th Session, on 30 October 2019, the Chamber of Local Authorities elected Emin YERITSYAN (Armenia, EPP/CCE), Councillor of the Community of Parakar and president of the Armenian delegation to the Congress, as vice-president.

The Chamber held also a debate on smart cities and cybersecurity where speakers focused on both the management potential which intelligent technologies offer as well as the dangers they pose as regards respect for civic and human rights. It was suggested during the debate that a common Charter on Smart Cities could be drawn up to prevent the fundamental values of democracy and human rights being eroded by excessively chaotic use of new technology in the area of governance.

The Chamber of Local Authorities held another debate on the working conditions of mayors and municipal councillors. The disaffection for office of local elected representatives is a cause for concern for the Congress as it poses a real threat to the health of local democracy. The debate revealed that most member States face very similar situations. The Congress members expressed a collective willingness to engage in co-ordinated action at European level building on good practices and proposals to give potential candidates a renewed opinion of the positions of mayor and municipal councillor.

Chamber of Regions

During the 37th Session, on the 30th October 2019, the Chamber of Regions elected Mustafa TUNÇ SOYER (Turkey, SOC/G/PD), Mayor of the metropolitan municipality of Izmir, as vice-president.

The Chamber held three debates. The first debate on “the regional dimension in the future of Europe: what prospects?” was held on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Council of Europe Reference Framework for Regional Democracy. Guest speakers included Nina BJÖRBY, Vice-President for Democracy of the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and Chairperson of the Culture Committee of the Västerbotten Region (Sweden), as well as Martin LAFFIN, Professor of Public Policy and Management at the Queen Mary University of London (United Kingdom).

The second debate examined the “Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: the role of regions”, with the participation of Carolina DARIAS SAN SEBASTIÁN, Councillor of the Government of the Canary Islands on the implementation of Agenda 2030 of the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands (Spain), and youth delegates. Speakers stressed the importance of localising sustainable development goals in order to achieve the UN Agenda 2030 and the valuable contribution the Congress could make in supporting cities and regions as well as national governments.

The third debate focused on: “Culture without Borders: European cultural routes”. Guest speakers in the debate were Levan KHARATISHVILI, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia and Vice-Chair of the Governing Board of the Council of Europe Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes (Georgia); as well as Rudolf GODESAR, Chair of the Task Force “Cross-border Culture” of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and in charge of cross-border cultural cooperation at the German-Speaking Community of Belgium.

D. THE COMMITTEES

Monitoring Committee

The meeting chaired by Leendert VERBEEK (Netherlands, SOC/G/PD), met in Strasbourg on 29 October, during the 37th Congress Session.

It adopted a report on local and regional democracy in Hungary and was informed on the preparation of draft reports on local democracy in Armenia and on local and regional democracy in Portugal which would be submitted for approval at the next Committee meeting in 2020. Members were informed about the preparation of the post-monitoring visit to the Republic of Moldova scheduled for 21 November 2019 and the monitoring visit to Austria scheduled from 10 to 12 December 2019.

The Committee also took note that the report on local elections in Turkey and mayoral re-run in Istanbul would be presented to the 37th Congress Session for adoption. It held an exchange of views on the situation in Turkey and the second part of the monitoring visit to Turkey, scheduled for 12-13 November 2019 - the first part of the visit took place from 1 to 3 October 2019. The approval of the draft report of this visit was scheduled for the next Committee meeting in 2020.

Following the discussions which took place on the occasion of the last Committee meeting on 3 July 2019, on the applicability of the Charter in the 47 member States, the Committee held an exchange of views and took note of the Congress Bureau decision to task the Congress Group of Independent experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government with the preparation of a study on the areas in which monitoring bodies have limited access which will be referred to the Governance Committee for consideration.

The Committee was informed about the launch of the on-line database of the Charter's monitoring "Carta – Monitor", which is accessible from the Congress website (see APPENDIX 3).

The Committee held another meeting in Metz on 11 February 2020, which was preceded by an address by Dominique GROS, Mayor of the City, and Jean-Pierre LIOUVILLE (France, SOC/G/PD), Councillor of the Grand Est Region.

The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss two reports on the monitoring of the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Armenia and Turkey, as well as a fact-finding report on the territorial reform in Latvia.

The agenda also included the approval of the reports on the observation of the local elections in the Republic of Moldova held on 20 October 2019 and on the Congress contribution to re-establishing local elections in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in view of the October 2020 general local elections.

In addition, the members approved the draft "Contemporary commentary on the explanatory report to the European Charter of Local Self-Government", which aims to put the provisions of the Charter - as developed in the explanatory report - into perspective in the light of the 30 years of its application.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the cancellation of the 38th session, the meeting of the Committee could not take place in March. The next meeting will take place in Strasbourg (video meeting) on 17 September 2020 with a thematic debate on "Safeguarding the European Charter of Local Self-Government in extreme crisis situations".

In view of the adoption during the September meeting also, the Monitoring Committee is currently preparing draft reports on Austria and Ukraine. The draft monitoring report on Portugal has been adopted by written procedure.

A reflection paper is being prepared on the challenges of holding local and regional elections in times of COVID-19 which will be discussed in the meeting in September. On the same occasion, also the second volume of the Congress Human Rights Handbook dedicated to social rights will be presented.

Governance Committee

The Committee chaired by Robert GRUMAN (Hungary, EPP/CCE) met on 29 October, during the 37th session of the Congress.

It examined several reports in preparation, in particular on "Smart cities: democratic and inclusive cities" presented by Martin FODOR (United Kingdom, ILDG) and on "Home sharing platforms, challenges and opportunities for municipalities" presented by Robert GRUMAN. Carlos VILLARO LARSEN, Secretary

General of the European Holiday Home Association (EHHA), took part in the debate on this matter, which is a pressing issue for many European cities.

The development of the interaction between urban and rural areas, and in particular the valorisation of the latter to face the depopulation issue, was also on the agenda with the presentation of an outline by co-rapporteurs Wilma DELISSEN VAN TONGERLO (Netherlands, ILDG) and Matija KOVAC (Serbia, EPP/CCE). The topic of the future of the municipal councillor, a role that is facing serious challenges was the subject of another presentation by Ebrahim ADIA (United Kingdom, SOC/G/PD).

The Committee also approved the Terms of Reference (ToR) concerning the preparation of a report about territorial solidarity and territorial justice.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the cancellation of the 38th session, the meeting of the Committee could not take place in March. The next meeting will take place in Strasbourg (video meeting) on 15 September 2020 with a thematic debate on "The COVID-19 pandemic and challenges for multi-level governance".

The draft reports on "Smart cities: opportunities and challenges for democracy" and "Developing the urban-rural interplay" are currently being completed and will be presented for adoption on 15 September. A presentation and exchange of views will also be held on 15 September regarding the preparation of the draft report "Home-sharing platforms: challenges and opportunities for municipalities".

Terms of Reference (ToR) for a new report on "Regional identities: improving dialogue to reduce regional tensions" were approved by the Congress Bureau on 9 June 2020. Further ToR for future reports are under preparation covering topical issues such as "Smart regions" and "Deliberative democracy in cities and regions".

Current Affairs Committee

The Current Affairs Committee chaired by Gabriele NEFF (Germany, EPP/CCE) met on 29 October 2019, during the 37th session.

On the agenda was a report on gender violence against women in politics at local and regional level. Jelena DRENJANIN (Sweden, EPP/CCE), rapporteur and spokesperson of the Congress on gender equality, presented a draft resolution that highlights, in particular, the need to combat hate speech and attacks against women elected or standing in elections, as this creates obstacles for them to participate fully and on an equal footing in political life.

This issue is part of the Congress's priorities for 2017-2020, which focus on promoting gender equality and preventing violence against women. Following a lively debate, the report was unanimously approved by the Committee and will be submitted for adoption at the 39th Session of the Congress in October 2020.

The Committee approved two terms of reference for the preparation of reports on youth work and on cultural heritage management, respectively. Members were also briefed on the Committee's activities. Feedback on the seminar on "Local democracy facing the demands of sustainable development" which took place on 12 September was presented by Jean Pierre LIOUVILLE. Youth delegates also spoke about three events organised around the theme of youth.

In addition, the terms of reference (ToR) for a new report regarding "The role and responsibilities of local government in protecting LGBTI+ people in the context of rising extremism and homophobia" have been adopted by written procedure on 3 April, together with the ToR for the appointment of a Congress Thematic Spokesperson on Climate Change and Environment, Vladimir PREBILIC (Slovenia, SOC/G/PD).

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the cancellation of the 38th session, the meeting of the Committee could not take place in March. The next meeting will be held on 16 September 2020 via the video-conferencing platform KUDO, and will include two debates, namely on lessons learned during the COVID-19 outbreak for protecting minorities in cities and regions and on the role of local governments in protecting LGBTI+ people.

Reports on "Youth Work: The role of local and regional authorities" (Rapporteurs Ilur METSHIN (Russian Federation, ILDG) and Thomas ANDERSSON (Sweden, ILDG)) and "Culture without borders: Cultural heritage management for local and regional development" (Rapporteurs Barbara TOCE (Italy,

SOC/G/PD) and Eirini DOUROU (Greece, SOC/G/PD)) are currently being finalised and will be ready for adoption at this meeting.

III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY

A. MONITORING ACTIVITIES

The core mission of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is the effective monitoring of the situation of local and regional democracy in member States by assessing the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted in 1985 and ratified by the 47 Member States of the Council of Europe.

Monitoring visits

Between October 2019 and March 2020, the Congress undertook monitoring visit, in 6 Member States.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, monitoring visits to the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Albania Azerbaijan and Ireland have been postponed to autumn this year (depending on the travel conditions), as it is the case for the post-monitoring visit to the Republic of Moldova.

Monitoring visits to Spain and Germany, originally on the work programme of 2020, will be carried out in 2021.

Turkey, 12 - 13 November 2019

As part of this second part of the visit, Jakob WIENEN and Yoomi RENSTRÖM (Sweden, SOC/G/PD), co-rapporteurs of the Congress, met in Ankara with representatives of the main political parties, as well as the head of the European Union delegation to Turkey and representatives of the Dutch and Swedish embassies. In Istanbul, meetings were held with the Mayor as well as with representatives of Human Rights Watch.

During the first part of the visit, from 1 to 3 October 2019, the Congress delegation had met with Turkish local and national authorities in Ankara and Diyarbakir.

Republic of Moldova, 21 November 2019

The Congress rapporteurs Gunn Marit HELGESEN and Marc COOLS carried out a post-monitoring visit to Chisinau. They met the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, the Minister of Finance, the Deputy Secretary General of the State Chancellery, the Vice-President of the Parliamentary Committee for Public Administration and Regional Development and the Bashkan (Governor) of the Gagauz-Yeri Territorial Unit.

The delegation discussed the achievements and challenges of the implementation of a roadmap, signed in 2016, and Recommendation 436 (2019) adopted by the Congress on 4 April 2019, in which the Congress invited the authorities of the Republic of Moldova to return to the path of decentralisation through appropriate and full implementation of all previous Congress recommendations. This post-monitoring procedure led to a revision of the roadmap in order to take into account the latest developments in local and regional democracy in the Republic of Moldova and the commitment of the Moldovan authorities at all levels of governance on this issue.

Portugal, 27 November 2019

In the second part of this visit, the Congress co-rapporteurs Xavier CADORET and David ERAY (Switzerland, ILDG) assessed the implementation of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, in the two Portuguese autonomous regions, the Azores and Madeira. They met in Lisbon with the Secretary General of the Association of Municipalities of the Azores (AMRAA) and an Associate Professor of History, Philosophy and Arts at the University of the Azores.

The delegation also met the Regional Director for European Affairs of the Regional Government of Madeira, the President of the Municipal Assembly, and the President of the Association of Municipalities of the Autonomous Region of Madeira (AMRAM).

The draft report on local and regional democracy in Portugal was discussed at the meeting of the Monitoring Committee on 11 February 2020.

The first part of the visit took place from 17 to 19 June 2019, during which the Congress delegation had met with Portuguese local and national authorities in Lisbon, Sintra and Alcácer do Sal.

Republic of Latvia, 4 December 2019

A delegation of the Congress carried out a fact-finding visit to the Republic of Latvia on 4 December 2019. The visit was organised following a complaint from the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG) concerning the ongoing territorial administrative reform and the risks it entails for local and regional democracy in Latvia.

In the framework of this fact-finding visit, Congress co-rapporteurs Xavier CADORET and Marc COOLS examined the points raised by the Latvian Association in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and held several discussions with the Latvian authorities.

The delegation met in Riga with the Mayor, the Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, as well as the Deputy State Secretary on Budget Issues. A meeting also took place with members of the Latvian delegation to the Congress and the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, in order to clarify the issues raised in the Association's letter.

See also I. POLITICAL AGENDA – political statements

Austria, 10 – 12 December 2019

The Congress rapporteurs Marc COOLS and Andrew DISMORE (United Kingdom, SOC/G/PD) met in Vienna with the Speaker of the Vienna Regional Parliament, the President of the Court of Audit, the President of the Federal Council, the President of the Austrian Delegation to the Congress, and the members of this delegation, as well as the Deputy Secretary General of the Association of Austrian Cities and towns and the Deputy Secretary General of the Association of Austrian Municipalities. They also met representatives of the Federal Chancellery, the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Ministry of Finance, as well as the Secretary General of the Constitutional Court.

The delegation held meetings also with the Mayor of Graz, and representatives of the Municipality of Graz, with the Director of the Court of Audit of Styria, as well as with representatives of the Land of Styria, including the Regional Minister for Economy, Europe, Science and Tourism and the Director of the Regional Parliament. In addition, the delegation met the Mayor of Raaba-Grambach.

Ukraine, 4 - 6 March 2020

The Congress rapporteurs Gunn Marit HELGESEN and Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM (Austria, SOC/G/PD), met in Kyiv with the Mayor of the city, the President of the Ukrainian Association of District and Regional Councils, the Executive Director of the Association of Ukrainian Cities, the Chair of the Association of Village and Town Councils, the Head of the Ukrainian Delegation to Congress and the Special Envoy of the German Government for Ukrainian Reform in the fields of Governance and Decentralisation.

The delegation held meetings also with, among others, the Deputy Minister of Community and Territorial Development, the Chair of the Committee on State Building, Local Governance, Regional and Urban Development of the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada), the Chair of the Constitutional Court and the Secretary of the Accounting Chamber. In Fastiv, the delegation met with the Mayor of the city and the Chairman of the District Council. Meetings also took place in Tomashivska with the Mayor and in Kyiv with the President of the Regional Council.

During the 37th session, the Congress adopted the following reports:

Local and regional democracy in the Russian Federation – [CG37\(2019\)11final](#)

In its report, the Congress noted with satisfaction the developments that have taken place since 2010: the principle of local self-government is now recognised both in the Constitution and in ordinary legislation, the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government are applied by the Constitutional Court in its case law, and a great variety of instruments of citizens' participation in local public affairs is available. Other positive changes that have been introduced in response to the Congress recommendation of 2010 include the reduction of minimum numbers of members for registration of political parties, the registration of candidates supported by associations and groups, and the re-introduction of direct election of governors in most of the federal subjects of the Russian Federation.

However, co-rapporteurs Jakob WIENEN and Stewart DICKSON noted several cases of non-compliance with the Council of Europe's principles that pose a general problem for the development of local and regional democracy in the country. In particular, the rapporteurs regret a low share of public affairs under the responsibility of local authorities, a lack of financial resources available to them, and an unclear division of competences between different levels of government. Moreover, they express their concern about the access to electoral rights in Russia, namely the limited freedom of independent and opposition candidates to stand for local and regional elections.

At the same time, the rapporteurs expressed their concern regarding the access of independent and opposition candidates to electoral rights as a result of legal requirements for candidates to gather a considerable number of signatures in support of their candidatures.

The deficiencies with the registration of independent candidates highlighted in the report had already been evoked by the Congress President in his statement of 12 September 2019, following municipal elections in the Russian Federation.

The Congress requests that Russia abolishes the legal provision requiring an excessive number of signatures and recommends guaranteeing equal access to electoral rights to independent and opposition candidates. It also recommends abolishing the "municipal filter", i.e. endorsement by municipal councillors of the candidatures at the level of federal subjects.

The Congress also drew attention to the issue of the involvement of governors in the appointment and dismissal of mayors, explaining that, given a strong tradition of centralism in Russia, this can regrettably pave the way for governors' political control over mayors and carries a very high risk of tightening a vertical axis of power. Similarly, the Russian legislation still permits the dismissal of mayors by the local councils and the Congress recommends amending the legislation to guarantee mayoral elections by voters and removing the legal provisions allowing the dismissal of mayors by governors.

Other recommendations include ensuring that local authorities dispose of adequate financial resources of their own and that the delegation of tasks to local authorities from the higher level of government is accompanied by commensurate funding to implement them.

The report is based on the findings of the visits to the Russian Federation on 23-25 October 2018 and 5-7 March 2019 and covers the period up to mid-July 2019.

Local and regional democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina – [CG37\(2019\)18](#)

The report on the state of local and regional democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina finds no major progress in implementing the recommendations that the Congress addressed to the authorities in 2012 and 2014.

Although noting with satisfaction that in Bosnia and Herzegovina local authorities enjoy freedom of association and that sub-state authorities actively engage in international cross-border co-operation, the report prepared by Leila HUNZIKER (Switzerland, SOC/G/PD) and Carla DEJONGHE (Belgium, ILDG), suggests that extremely complex and incoherent systems of local government in the country's entities need an overhaul.

The country's continued failure to reform its system of local self-government has resulted in the lack of clarity in the allocation of responsibilities between the various levels of authority, insufficient respect of the principle of subsidiarity, the lack of consultation of local authorities on all issues that directly concern them and the absence of elections in Mostar (since 2008). In respect of the situation in Mostar, the Congress welcomed in particular the recent European Court of Human Rights judgement in the case of Baralija vs Bosnia and Herzegovina and called on the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to ensure its implementation.

In the opinion of the co-rapporteurs, the main obstacle to achieving tangible improvements is an omnipresent, pervasive control by political parties divided along ethnic lines, combined with a patronage system.

According to the report, two entities have very different systems of local government, but nevertheless face serious common challenges, such as, an aging population and increased youth emigration; a growing urban-rural divide; fragmented and costly local administration and insufficient co-operation among various levels of government.

On the basis of the monitoring visits in November 2018 and February 2019, the co-rapporteurs doubt that any substantial changes can be expected in the near future due to the political situation in Bosnia

and Herzegovina. Instead, they favour applying additional efforts to make the best possible use of the existing constitutional and legal framework.

The Congress recommends that the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers invites the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to take necessary steps towards implementing the previous recommendations, which would allow the local institutions to fully guarantee efficient services and to make a greater contribution to the development of the country.

B. OBSERVATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS

Over the last 15 years, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has observed more than 100 local and regional elections in Council of Europe member States and occasionally also beyond. Such missions are conducted further to the invitation of the national authorities or competent electoral bodies and they complement the political monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Assistance in following-up to Congress' recommendations prepared further to observation missions can be provided through a post-electoral dialogue.

Observation missions

Since 23 October 2019, the Congress undertook 1 preparatory mission to Sarajevo and Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in preparation for the local elections to be held in October 2020

Further to the postponement of the local elections in Serbia, the Congress mission was also cancelled. With regard to further possible election observation missions to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine, the Congress stands ready to consider the deployment of observation missions, pending on further decisions of the according authorities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, 26 – 27 November 2019

The Congress delegation carried out a preparatory mission to Sarajevo and Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in preparation for the local elections to be held in October 2020. Members of the European Committee of the Regions of the European Union accompanied the Congress delegation.

In Sarajevo, the delegation held exchanges with the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Deputy Speaker in the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly, the President of the Central Election Commission of BiH, and the President of the BiH Constitutional Court.

Meetings were held also with representatives of the international community, including the Chief of Policy and Planning of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Deputy Head of the European Union Delegation to BiH.

In Mostar, the delegation held an exchange with the Naša stranka, on the 29 October decision of the European Court of Human Rights ruling that Bosnia and Herzegovina was in violation of the European Convention of Human rights as it did not hold municipal elections in Mostar for more than a decade. In response to this situation, the Congress has set up, in 2017, a "Reflection Group on Mostar" to help restore local democracy in this city, which has been in a political deadlock since 2008.

This meeting was followed by a presentation by a Congress Expert on "Building Democratic Participation in the City of Mostar" – innovative local initiatives on citizen participation for representatives of political parties and NGOs, and an exchange of views with representatives of political parties and civil society.

Adopted reports

During the 37th session, the Congress adopted the following report:

Local elections in Turkey and Mayoral re-run in Istanbul – [CG37\(2019\)14final](#)

The Congress adopted this report following observation missions of the local elections in Turkey (31 March 2019) and the Istanbul repeat mayoral election (23 June 2019). The debate was held in the presence of the Mayor of Istanbul Ekrem İMAMOĞLU.

Presented by Congress Rapporteur Andrew DAWSON (United Kingdom, ECR), the report states that, overall, the two polls were conducted in order and were administered satisfactorily, with a remarkably high turnout. Overall, the polling station commissions (CBV) performed their technical and procedural tasks competently.

However, the adopted recommendation points to several necessary improvements. Apart from the equal playing field for all parties and candidates, the most urgent reform steps include the Supreme Election Council (SEC) of Turkey, against whose decisions no appeal is possible. The Congress calls on the Turkish authorities to clarify the electoral legislation and to harmonise all election laws in order to give them a coherent framework. It also recommends the removal of overly restrictive limitations of freedoms of association, assembly and expression in order to re-establish an environment fully conducive to genuinely democratic elections.

With regard to the situation leading to the renewal of the election of the Mayor of Istanbul, the Congress calls for the revision of the 2018 legal amendments, in particular the regulation on the status of civil servants required for Presidents and Deputies of Ballot Box Committees.

In addition, the Congress calls for strengthening the training of members of polling station commissions, the accuracy of voter lists, and the participation of women in politics. It also recommends the adoption of clear and fair regulations on the conduct of campaigns, in particular the misuse of administrative resources, as well as the revision of anti-terrorist legislation.

The Congress expressed its concern that mayors elected in the March 31 local elections in the south-east of the country have been denied their terms of office because of previous charges and were replaced by candidates who came second. Furthermore, suspension of elected mayors took place due to accusations of links to terrorism, who were replaced by officials nominated by central authorities. The Congress concluded that both actions run counter to the freely expressed will of voters and the principle of fairness in elections.

See also I. POLITICAL AGENDA – political statements

IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES

The Congress supports local authorities in the performance of their duties in respect of their citizens and it supports them in their search for solutions to the challenges they face, in particular in terms of security, integration, dialogue and participation, respect for fundamental human and social rights, and the inclusion of vulnerable populations.

It initiates reflections and projects on these topics and contributes actively to the work being done in this connection within the Council of Europe and at European level.

A. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

On 18 November 2019, the European Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, Harald BERGMANN (Netherlands, SOC/G/PD), declared that coordinated strategies must be developed at the heart of the territories that take children into account throughout the whole process.

Underlining the importance of sharing the good practices that have proved their worth and to promote a truly transversal approach between all actors, he explained that this was the objective of the "Pact of Cities and Regions to stop Sexual Violence against Children", launched by the Congress and which brings together nearly 80 cities, regions and associations of municipalities and regions from 24 European countries. The Pact proposes various measures to prevent abuse, protect victims, prosecute perpetrators and ensure the full participation of children in the process as a whole.

B. GENDER EQUALITY

The Congress will continue to contribute to the strategic objectives of the Council of Europe (adopted by the Committee of Ministers in March 2018) which are of relevance for local and regional politicians, also keeping in mind the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular SDG 5 (achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls). The focus in the coming biennium will be on fighting sexism in politics at the local and regional level as well as gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.

On 10 December 2019 in Kyiv, Ukraine, Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM stated at the Third Ukrainian Women's Congress that although gender equality remains a challenge at all levels, the change starts at the local level. Local policies and initiatives can help to improve gender equality and protect women's rights by countering traditional gender roles and stereotypical misconceptions. She invited women to take an active role in local and regional political life and make use of the Congress recommendations and resolutions advocating gender equality and a balanced representation of women and men in

decision-making. She also reminded that the ongoing decentralisation process in Ukraine is a great opportunity to enhance and mainstream gender equality, and that achieving it at local and regional level would contribute to the realisation of Ukraine's commitments to the United Nations 2030 Agenda, in particular to the 5th SDG on Gender Equality.

Ms MÖSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM'S participation in the 3rd Ukrainian Women's Congress was organised in the framework of the project "Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine", implemented by the Congress as part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021.

On 8 March 2020, the International Women's Day, Congress spokesperson on gender equality Jelena DRENJANIN stated that achieving gender equality in political representation is essential to the functioning of democracy. While welcoming the increase in the proportion of women at the political level and in particular in municipal councils, she stressed the many obstacles that remain, in particular the sexist violence and harassment against women running for election or holding political office which has become more visible with the development of social media and the Internet. She underlined that local and regional authorities can have a real impact by taking strong positions against sexism, aiming for zero tolerance within their administrations but also within their political parties.

A resolution and a recommendation on fighting sexism against women in politics at local and regional level will be submitted to the Congress for adoption in October 2020. The report is part of the work that the Congress has been carrying out for several years to promote women's participation in public life, gender equality and women's rights.

On 2 July, the Congress organised a webinar on the occasion of the publication of "A Guide for Women and Men in Local Politics: Preventing and combatting sexism at local level in Ukraine" (see VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS)

C. INCLUSION OF ROMA AND TRAVELLERS / EUROPEAN ALLIANCE OF CITIES AND REGIONS FOR THE INCLUSION OF ROMA AND TRAVELLERS

John WARMISHAM, Congress rapporteur on Roma issues, welcomed the adoption on 22 January 2020, by the Committee of Ministers of a Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion 2020-2025 to combat anti-Gypsyism and discrimination and to support equality. He underlined that the work of the Congress in favour of the integration of Roma and Travellers and their protection against discrimination and violent attacks is fully in line with this Action Plan. The Plan highlights the need to strengthen the capacity of local and regional authorities, who are at the forefront of providing solutions on the ground, and this is what the Congress will continue to do through its European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion.

On the International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January 2020, John WARMISHAM, recalled that Nazi ideology was based on racism and discrimination against Jews, but also against Roma and Travellers who were persecuted. He called for local and regional elected representatives, to publicly condemn all forms of discrimination and act together, on the ground, as close as possible to citizens to ensure that their rights are respected.

On 8 April 2020, the International Roma Day, John WARMISHAM stated that in times of public health crises, inequalities increase risk for Roma communities. This year's International Roma Day has come at a time when the world is facing a major public health challenge due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He underlined that the Roma who live in settlements and who have difficulty accessing healthcare and sanitation are vulnerable. They need the help of local governments to access support services and to protect them against racist attacks.

D. EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK (ELDW)

On 6 December 2019 in Brussels, Bryony RUDKIN (United Kingdom, SOC/G/PD), Congress Thematic Spokesperson on the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW), took part in the ELDW closing conference organised by Brulocalis (Association of the City and the Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region).

The ELDW annual coordination meeting was held on 25 February 2020 in Strasbourg. Chaired by the ELDW Spokesperson, the meeting brought together around 45 local elected representatives and municipal officials from five European countries (Armenia, Portugal, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine). The participants evaluated the 2019 edition, shared their best practices in participatory democracy and discussed new perspectives for the 2020 edition on the theme of "Local Democracy – Building Trust". They also held initial exchanges in view of the future theme of the ELDW for 2021-2022.

On this occasion, the title of “Partner of the European Local Democracy Week 2019” was awarded to 19 municipalities from four countries that have committed themselves to go further in the promotion of local democracy. The awarded municipalities have implemented initiatives such as participatory budgets, youth councils, sign language courses to facilitate inclusion in the city, debates on citizen participation, training on sustainable entrepreneurship and theatre workshops. At the end of the ceremony, the Thematic Spokesperson presented the certificates to the partners in recognition of their commitment to the ELDW.

Participants also exchanged views on the new ELDW modalities, which include the organisation of activities throughout the year, a flagship event during the week of 15 October – date of the signing of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1985 – and the designation of a person of local influence as “Voice of the European Local Democracy Week” to bring the initiative closer to as many citizens as possible.

E. WORLD FORUM OF DEMOCRACY

The 2019 edition of the World Forum for Democracy, on the theme “Is Democracy in Danger in the Information Age?”, took place in Strasbourg from 6 to 8 November. The Congress sponsored two Forum Labs, on rebuilding trust in institutions (Lab 2) and on local journalism: at the frontline of information (Lab 9).

Co-sponsored with the Grand-Est Region of France, Lab 2 addressed the issue of transparency, with the participation of Marc COOLS, Congress Rapporteur on the fight against corruption, and Roberto RAMPI, Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Italy). One of the grassroots initiatives presented in Lab 2, “Follow the money” from Nigeria, won the Council of Europe’s Democracy Innovation Award.

Speakers in Lab 9 included Congress Thematic Spokesperson on the Promotion of Public Ethics and the Prevention of Corruption Andrew DAWSON, Congress member Jean-Paul BASTIN (Belgium, EPP/CCE) and Elsa SCHALCK, Vice-President of the Grand-Est Region (France) in charge of Youth Delegation, Territorial Orientation and Democracy.

The participation of the Congress also involved the presence at the Forum of a delegation of representatives of local and regional authorities of Ukraine and Georgia, in the framework of the Congress co-operation activities in those countries, and in particular the project entitled “Strengthening democracy and building confidence at local level”.

F. UNITED NATIONS AGENDA 2030 – IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

The United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development lists 17 objectives to be achieved to build a socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable and economically prosperous society. The Council of Europe contributes to its implementation through a human rights-based approach stemming from its pan-European dimension, institutions, normative framework and capacity for action.

The Congress views the concept of sustainability in a broad sense, as democratic, social and economic sustainability built on a number of key principles: Achieving SDGs is a shared responsibility for all levels of government - Local and regional authorities must have proper competences and financial autonomy - Citizens must always remain at the heart of the action. The Congress’ work focuses on 12 of the 17 objectives defined in the Agenda.

The co-operation programmes and projects of the Congress contribute in particular to the Sustainable Development Goals 5 (Gender equality), 10 (Reduced inequalities), 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) and 17 (Partnership for the goals) respectively.

In order to implement the SDGs successfully, the Congress cooperates with a wide range of actors: its institutional partners within the Council of Europe, in particular, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Office of the Directorate General of Programmes; international organisations representing local and regional authorities, such as United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG); European institutions, such as the European Committee of the Regions, the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE), the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR).

On 25 October 2019 in Vilnius, Congress Vice-President Tamar TALIAHVILI stated at the EU Eastern Partnership (EU-EaP) Forum that SDGs have primarily been conceived to address challenges at a

global level, but they have to be implemented at local and regional levels to have an actual impact. Organised by the Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania and CEMR's PLATFORMA of CEMR on the occasion of the Partnership's 10th anniversary, the theme of the Forum was "Localising Sustainable Development Goals". Speaking on the panel "Providing tangible results to PEOPLE after 2020", Mrs. TALIASHVILI referred to decentralisation as a key element of territorial development and an essential component of the effort to achieve SDGs, as it places citizens at the centre of the development process and allows them to be fully engaged.

On 22 November 2019 in Lagoa, Azores (Portugal), the Secretary General of the Congress participated in the XVI edition of the Carnegie Mellon University (CMU)'s "Jornadas Autarquias" which discussed challenges faced by cities and municipalities for serving citizens better by using new technologies and becoming smart cities, while ensuring their inclusion and participation. He invited the representatives of the three European associations to make use of the Congress' monitoring reports and thematic work, which include concrete political and legal recommendations addressed to the governments of the member States and the regional governments of the autonomous regions of Portugal and Spain.

On 25 November 2019, in the framework of the 25th Lisbon Forum on the relation between development and human rights, rule of law and democracy, the Congress organised a workshop on the contribution of local and regional authorities to the implementation of the United Nations Agenda 2030, entitled "Why does localising SDGs matter? - Building a sustainable future in our communities" (see V. INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE)

On 18 December 2019, the International Migrants' Day, Harald BERGMANN (Netherlands, ILDG) spokesperson on Human Rights, stressed that even if migration policies are decided at European or national level, on the ground, it is cities and regions that are in the front line to welcome migrants and guarantee their rights. He underlined that this is a shared responsibility that falls to all levels of governance, European and national, but also regional and local. He stated that through its work, the Congress contributes to the achievement of Objective 10 of the Agenda 2030 by proposing strategies that engage all stakeholders to combat inequalities.

On 27 February 2020, Harald BERGMANN participated in a high-level conference on "Environmental protection and Human Rights" organised under the aegis of the Georgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. He stated that local and regional elected representatives are in a unique position to tackle climate emergency and promote sustainable development by shaping policy to fit local needs. Speaking at the session on "The role of elected representatives and civil society", Mr. BERGMANN explained that localising SDGs is necessary not only because it allows to develop local strategies to achieve global goals but also because it is in the cities, town and villages where people live that change can take place. He underlined that environmental protection is a part of good governance and that both are linked to human rights by a relationship of interdependence: a safe, clean and healthy environment is essential for the enjoyment of human rights, and the exercise of human rights is vital to the protection of the environment. He advocated an active engagement from civil society, as localising SDGs allows to empower citizens and to receive in return more concrete indications of what is needed to be done to be truly sustainable.

V. INSTITUTIONAL CO-OPERATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

A. THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR

The Committee of Ministers

The President and the Secretary General of the Congress hold regular exchanges of views and communications with the Ministers' Deputies. The Congress also contributes actively to the activities of the chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers.

Annual exchange of views of the President with the Committee of Ministers

On the occasion of his exchange of views with the Committee of Ministers on 26 February 2020, the President invited member States to make the most of the experience and commitment of local and regional elected representatives on the ground. He stressed that they form a vast network, and a

distribution chain to promote the Council of Europe's legal instruments and policies, respect for human rights, the defence of democracy and the rule of law throughout Europe.

The President presented the key areas identified for the future priorities of the Congress for the period 2021-2026 to the Ministers' Deputies: the quality of democracy, social inequalities, environmental issues and the digital revolution. He underlined that these priorities will be in line with those set by the Council of Europe as well as with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations Agenda 2030 and recalled that the Congress brings the local and regional dimension to the work of the Council of Europe and advocates the location of SDGs in cities and regions so that the necessary measures are implemented not only in capitals, but also at local and regional level.

Using its statutory means and tools - plenary sessions, work programme of the Chambers and Committees, monitoring, election observation - and its co-operation activities on the ground, the Congress will continue to design responses that will help local and regional elected representatives to meet the major challenges they face,

Communication by the Secretary General to the Deputies in the Committee of Ministers

On 23 October 2019, the Secretary General presented the activities of the Congress (Mid-April – Mid-October 2019). In particular he informed the Deputies of the decisions taken by the Bureau of the Congress, relating, to increased co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly, the ongoing reflection to determine the priorities of the Congress for the next four years and the mandate given to the Group of Independent Experts to identify areas of non-applicability of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the reservations made by member States in this respect.

The Secretary General also referred to the statement adopted by the Bureau on 11 September 2019 concerning the financial and human resources of the Congress. In this statement, the Bureau highlights the fact that the steady decline in the budget of the Congress in recent years does not allow it to fully carry out its missions including its monitoring of local and regional democracy in all member States. This budgetary situation has also led to the suspension of the financing of the interpretation and translation into the working languages of the Council of Europe by the Congress budget, which is detrimental to the quality of its work. A share of 3% of the budget of the Organisation would allow the Congress to remedy this situation and would be a positive signal from the governments towards the local authorities for whom the Congress works.

[Activity report CG37\(2019\)23](#)

Following the request of the Congress Bureau, the Committee of Ministers accepted to extend the current mandate of the Congress delegations until the spring session 2021 (provisionally scheduled for 23-25 March 2021) (see II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES)

B. THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

The Congress holds regular exchanges with the Parliamentary Assembly, in order to increase co-operation at the level of rapporteurs and the respective secretariats as well as in areas of common interest, in particular in the framework of the implementation of Council of Europe Campaigns.

On 29 October 2019, the then President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Liliane MAURY PASQUIER, called for more political coordination between the Assembly and the Congress (see II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES)

C. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW

The Congress is working in close co-operation with the Venice Commission, particularly in the field of election observation and the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The Council for Democratic Elections (CED) is a platform for electoral cooperation between the Venice Commission, in its capacity as legal body, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress, as political organs responsible for election observation in their respective areas.

Members of the Congress on the Council for Democratic Elections are currently the thematic Spokespersons on the Observation of Local and Regional Elections, Jakob WIENEN and Stewart DICKSON, Vladimir PREBILIC and Rosaleen O'GRADY (Ireland, ILDG)

Gianni BUQUICCHIO, President of the Venice Commission, and Harald BERGMANN, Congress rapporteur, presented the Venice Principles on the protection and promotion of the ombudsman institution during the 37th session. Mr BERGMANN underlined that the Ombudsman institution is a key

element in a state based on democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and good governance which are present in more than 140 states around the world have ombudsman institutions at national, regional or local level with different competences. He stressed the relevance of this text for local and regional authorities as it affords new possibilities in the event of a conflict with higher authorities. The principles pave the way for oversight of public authorities and, at the same time, increase public confidence in local and regional administrations.

On 19 June 2020, Jakob WIENEN and Stewart DICKSON expressed strong support for the legal opinion adopted by the Venice Commission on the replacement of elected candidates and mayors in Turkey. This opinion responds to a request sent by the Congress in November 2019, concerning several decisions made by the Turkish State authorities after the 31 March local elections and follows the Congress election observation report which had identified serious concerns regarding the situation of local elected representatives (see I. POLITICAL AGENDA)

D. THE NORTH-SOUTH CENTRE

Xavier CADORET took part in the Jury of the North-South Prize held in Strasbourg on 18 October which was awarded to the two candidates proposed by the Congress: Nabila HAMZA (municipal Councillor of La Marsa, Tunisia) and Leoluca ORLANDO (Mayor of Palermo, Italy) for their exceptional commitment to promoting North-South solidarity.

On 25-26 November 2019, Gunn Marit HELGESEN and Xavier CADORET, as well the Secretary General of the Congress, participated in the 2019 Lisbon Forum dedicated to "Bridging the Paradigm: the relation between Development and Human Rights, the Rule of Law and Democracy. Achieving together the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)". In this context, the Congress organised a workshop on the contribution of local and regional authorities to the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the importance of localising SDGs to build a sustainable future for the communities.

In a communication addressed during a ceremony held on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the North-South Centre in Strasbourg on 10 December 2019, Anders KNAPE, speaking in the name of the local and regional dimension, underlined that during the 30 years of its existence, the Centre has become an indispensable platform of dialogue for the members of the quadrilogue on both sides of the Mediterranean. The President praised the Centre for its remarkable work in bringing the Council of Europe values and message beyond European borders, connecting people and representing the voice of non-member states in the Council of Europe.

On 30 June 2020, Gunn Marit HELGESEN participated in the the North-South Centre Executive Committee meeting. She praised the work of the in the face of the COVID-19 crisis and reiterated the support of the Congress, in particular with regard to the #SolidAction initiative launched as part of the collective mobilisation campaign for solidarity in the context of the Coronavirus crisis. She underlined that the Congress will also devote an important part of its next session (27-29 October 2020) to the lessons learned from the crisis and the role played by local and regional authorities in handling the effects of the crisis.

E. THE CONFERENCE OF INGOs

The Congress and the Conference of INGOs have a close cooperation particularly on thematic issues such as equality, youth participation, citizen participation and religion related issues.

On 30 October 2019, Rapporteur Thomas ANDERSSON presented the revised version of the "Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process", prepared by a joint working group formed by the Congress and the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe.

Adopted by the Conference in 2009, the Code defines means to strengthen civil participation and mechanisms for NGO participation in the decision-making process. Its revision, which aims at adapting the Code to the social and technological changes that have occurred since, was adopted in parallel by the Congress and by the Conference on 30 October 2019. In particular, the revised Code proposes to create a "toolkit" - a repertoire of good practices - which will provide guidelines based on the experience of dialogue with citizens and cooperation with NGOs.

The work on the new Code, which highlights the principles of transparency, accessibility, non-discrimination, inclusiveness and accountability, contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDGs 11 and 16.

VI. EXTERNAL COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

A. THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Congress and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) of the European Union maintain close co-operation and working relations, both at the political level and the level of the respective secretariats, based on the Cooperation Agreement, revised most recently in March 2018. This co-operation is based on the commonality of the objective of reinforcing local and regional democracy, devolution and self-government in Europe, and on the complementarity of action.

Co-operation is steered by the Congress/CoR High-Level Group (HLG) which includes the Congress President and its two Chamber Presidents, and the CoR President, First Vice-President and President of the CIVEX Commission, assisted by the respective Secretaries General. The HLG meets at the beginning of the year to compare the political agendas, set priority areas of co-operation and identify potential for joint action. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a short High-Level Group meeting is scheduled to take place online on 10 July, with a regular meeting planned for December,

The respective Presidents address a plenary session of the other's institution at least once during their mandate.

As of June 2020, 62 members of the Congress were also CoR members. Up until February 2020, the Presidents of the two institutions were members of the Bureau (Vice-Presidents) of the other institution; the Congress President currently remains a Vice-President of the Committee of the Regions.

In 2019, both institutions marked their 25th anniversary by organising a joint event on 27 June in the European Parliament in Brussels.

In practical terms, co-operation includes regular exchange of information and documents, contribution to the preparation of reports and to debates in committees/commissions and working groups, exchanges of views with rapporteurs, participation in each other's events and statutory meetings, and organisation of joint activities (for example, a conference on fighting corruption at local and regional level).

Specific geographic areas of co-operation include the Eastern Partnership of the EU, the South Mediterranean and South-East Europe.

Eastern Partnership: The Congress and CoR co-operate within the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities of the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), as well as in the CoR Task Force on Ukraine.

South Mediterranean: The Congress and CoR co-operate within the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) as well as in the Council of Europe's North-South Centre, where both institutions represent the local and regional dimension of the quadrilogue.

South-East Europe: The Congress and CoR co-operate within the Congress Reflection Group on Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the CoR Working Group on Western Balkans; the Congress also shares its monitoring and election observation findings (for example, on Serbia, Turkey and Republic of Moldova) with other relevant working groups.

In addition to its co-operation with CoR, the Congress also co-operates with the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) in support of its "joint-up approach" of ensuring human rights delivery at local and regional level as a shared responsibility of all levels of governance.

The Secretary General of the Congress and the Secretary of the COR P. Bližkovský held meetings in February and May to organise the forthcoming High-Level Group meeting and future cooperation between the two Assemblies.

Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM)

At the 11th Plenary Session of ARLEM, which was held on 23 January 2020 in Barcelona, Vice-President Xavier CADORET underlined that in the context of geopolitical instability and climate emergency, Euro-Mediterranean integration at the local level is fundamental for building a fairer and more sustainable future together. He highlighted the crucial role played by the local level in the concrete implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the importance in this regard of a strengthened co-operation between European local elected representatives and their Southern Mediterranean counterparts. He underlined that the common objectives should include, in particular, the provision of green public services, in line with the concept of smart cities, the development of

sustainable tourism and the creation of partnerships between local authorities to exchange good practices. He recalled that a platform for co-operation with Southern Mediterranean countries exists within the Congress thanks to the status of Partner for Local Democracy, which is part of its South-Med Partnership.

B. EUROPEAN ASSOCIATIONS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

An annual coordination meeting between the Secretary General of the Congress and the Secretary Generals of major European associations took place on 29 May 2020 by video conference.

Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

Participating in a conference on “Reflection on the future of Europe: how local and regional governments can contribute to revive the European Project?” organised by the CEMR in Orléans, France, on 23 January 2020, the President of the Congress underlined that local and regional authorities can contribute to reviving the European project first and foremost by engaging citizens in this process, as the public authorities closest to them. The President also stressed the responsibility of national governments to give local and regional authorities the competences, financial resources, tools and autonomy necessary to carry out their missions, for the success of the European project.

Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)

On the occasion of the annual conference of the AEBR, Eirini DOUROU, rapporteur for Culture with no Borders at the Congress, addressed the participants at the session on the “Best Practices of Cross-Border Culture Cooperation in Rural Areas”, in Dresden on 25 October 2019.

The Congress rapporteur underlined the importance of local and regional authorities which reveals the way culture and patrimonies can contribute to restore citizen trust in the common European values.

The report on cultural routes and heritage in Europe under preparation at the Congress will aim to show how different cultures and patrimonies can help living together by sharing common fundamental cultural values. Ms DOUROU welcomed the upcoming participation of Rudolf GODESAR, Chair of the AEBR Task Force “Cross-border Culture”, in the 37th Session of the Congress, on 30 October 2019, in the debate “Culture without borders and the European cultural routes”.

Assembly of European Regions (AER).

The Congress and the AER maintain excellent political relations and fruitful co-operation in areas of common interest, such as regional democracy, the implementation of the local and regional dimension of Sustainable Development Goals and the integration of refugees and migrants into societies.

On 23 October 2019, Congress Secretary General met with AER President Magnus BERNTSSON (Västra Götaland) and Albert CASTELLANOS MADUELL (Catalunya), AER Vice President for Sustainable Development. They reaffirmed their willingness to take into account each other's role, mandate, membership and experience - that of the Congress as a European institution and that of the AER as the main network of regions of the European continent.

C. NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

On 11 December 2019, Andreas KIEFER, Secretary General of the Congress, on the occasion of the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) enlarged Strategic Planning Working Group meeting stressed that the Association of Ukrainian Cities should base its advocacy before national authorities on a participatory process and by developing strong internal structures and consensual strategic approaches with its members. This meeting is a follow-up of the regional workshops which gathered more than hundred members of the association. The AUC is resolutely engaged in a process of strategic planning to guide its institutional development, build a solid financial foundation and sustainability, and prepare for challenges that lie ahead. Initiated in the margins of the XV Ukrainian Municipal Forum in Odesa in June 2019, the process of the AUC's midterm strategy has been designed to generate decisions that are reached by consensus, ensuring that both members and executive staff share the Association's vision and mission and are committed to achieving it with a unified voice.

This activity was organised in the framework of the project “Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine”, implemented by the Congress as part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021 (see V. COOPERATION ACTIVITIES)

On 24 February 2020, Congress President welcomed the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe between NALAG and the Georgian government.

This ceremony took place during the president's official visit to Georgia, organised in the framework of the Georgian chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers (see I. POLITICAL AGENDA)

VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS

The Congress provides practical support by means of co-operation projects to address shortcomings of local democracy identified during the monitoring and post-monitoring of the Charter and the observation of local and regional elections. These projects take place within the Council of Europe country-specific Action Plans or within the policy towards neighbouring regions.

Co-operation projects and activities are carried out by the Congress secretariat in close co-operation and synergy with the other entities of the organisation.

Principles and methodology

Since October 2012, more than 1200 mayors, councillors and young local leaders benefited from the Congress activities in Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, as well as in Kosovo*¹, Morocco, and Tunisia. Those activities amount to approximately nine million EUR, funded by voluntary contributions from member States and the European Union.

The activities implemented are diverse and adapted to the needs of the beneficiaries: workshops, regional seminars, platforms for exchanges and networking, direct support, political mediation, and advocacy support and legal advice. Peer exchange allows for fruitful debates on principles and standards of local democracy and sharing of innovative practices of governance. As of today, more than 70 Congress members representing 25 Member States have taken part in peer work, in addition to the members from the respective national delegations of Albania, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

The co-operation activities are designed to inspire mayors and councillors to lead the change in their municipalities, so as to strengthen transparency, accountability and citizen participation in their decision-making. In addition, the Congress supports them to commonly defend their interests vis-à-vis the national authorities, in close coordination with their associations.

The prevention of corruption is a central theme of the political and operational activities. It is based on a set of handbooks on transparency and citizen participation for local authorities in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine which result from previous project activities. The work in this field draws from the resolutions and recommendations on transparency and open government, resolving conflict of interest, fighting nepotism, protecting whistle-blowers, cutting the misuse of administrative resources, as well as on the European Code of Conduct for all Persons Involved in Local and Regional Governance, which is part of the Congress Roadmap of activities for preventing corruption and promoting public ethics at local and regional levels.

The right of local authorities to be consulted is another core feature of co-operation projects, with regards to the new guidelines adopted by the Congress in November 2018. The activities are focused on empowering local and regional authorities and their association by equipping them with analytical skills which will enable them to defend the positions and advocate for the comprehensive legislative and institutional changes needed.

In addition, a stronger gender perspective was introduced in all activities to foster gender equality and promote the participation of women in local political life. This is directly linked to the human rights dimension taken when carrying out the activities in the field. The support to gender mainstreaming, as well as to the participation and inclusion of under-represented groups, especially Internally displaced persons, Roma and other minorities at local level, is thereby intensified. Proposals for new bilateral projects in Belarus and Georgia and projects on cross-cutting themes of interest for local authorities are currently being developed. The co-operation activities directly contribute to the implementation of the

¹ (*) All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, elaborating on the wider Council of Europe contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – in particular to the achieving Sustainable Development Goals 5 (Gender Equality), 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), and 17 (Partnership for the goals). Moreover, they contribute to the EU Eastern Partnership 20 deliverables for 2020, chiefly in the enhancement of the skills of local public administrations and in the prevention of corruption.

A. ARMENIA

On 4 March 2020, representatives of Armenian local and national authorities, civil society and international organisations met during the Conference on political integrity of local elected representatives, held in Yerevan. The conference led to the establishment of the Community of Practice on Public Integrity and Ethics in Local Governance in Armenia, which will act as a coordinating group for the localisation of national anti-corruption policies and their implementation by local authorities in Armenia. Its members will advocate for a better application of European standards on public ethics, transparent and open governance and citizen participation throughout Armenia, in order to restore citizens' trust in public institutions and local authorities in particular.

The conference was followed on 5 March by a first meeting of the Community of Practice to discuss relevant tools - guidelines, models and methods - to assess corruption risks at local level, but also to develop local strategies and a model code of conduct for all those involved in local governance in Armenia.

To facilitate the work of the Community of Practice, four working groups have been established on anti-corruption policies, public integrity, transparency in public procurement and transparency and openness in government. The working groups held their first meetings online in June 2020, to discuss their work plans, with the second round of meetings planned for July.

Special co-operation has been developed with Armenia's Open Government secretariat, with a particular focus on preparing the local authorities' contribution to the new National Action Plan on open government. Discussions are also being held with the European Network of Training Organisations (ENTO) on developing an online training platform for the Community of Practice.

In addition, support was provided to the Communities Association of Armenia (CAA) in strengthening its secretariat, inter alia in undertaking a transparent recruitment process for the position of Executive Director. A grant agreement was signed in May 2020 to support the CAA's institutional capacities in the areas of project development, resources mobilisation, communication and public relations, as well as relations with member communities.

These events are organised in the framework of the project "Strengthening the Communities Association of Armenia and Transparent, Participatory Local Governance in Armenia". It is implemented by the Congress, with the financial support of the Swiss government, in the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2019-2022.

B. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Since February 2020 the Congress is implementing a new project in Mostar, which follows on the work of "The Reflection Group on Mostar", established by the Congress in 2017, with the aim to address the lack of elections in the city since 2008 and to contribute to a sustainable solution for local democracy. The project "Building democratic participation in the City of Mostar" seeks to contribute to increasing citizens' influence on local governance and to support the dialogue among stakeholders paving the way towards an electoral process in Mostar.

The Reflection Group on Mostar organised its latest mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina on 26 and 27 November 2019, following the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the case *Baralija vs. Bosnia and Herzegovina* from 29 October 2019. The Congress adopted the [Recommendation 442 \(2019\)](#) on Local and regional democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which the situation in Mostar had been addressed as well.

The Congress President welcomed the agreement on Mostar from 17 June 2020, signed between HDZ and SDA, which is aimed at reinstating free and democratic suffrage in the City of Mostar, by issuing a public statement on 18 June 2020.

C. GEORGIA

On 26 November 2019, on the occasion of the workshop ‘Strengthening human rights at local level in Georgia’ held in Tbilisi, Harald BERGMANN, Congress Spokesperson on Human Rights at Local and Regional Levels stressed that local authorities have a key role in respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights by raising awareness in their communities, sharing good practices among peers and equipping themselves with the necessary mechanisms for their realisation. Jointly organised by the Congress and the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG), participants discussed the implementation of human rights obligations and standards at local level in Georgia, with a particular focus on gender equality, non-discrimination and inclusion of minorities and vulnerable groups.

NALAG and Congress Vice-President Tamar TALIASHVILI underlined that the European Charter of Local Self-Government sets out the principle of subsidiarity which gives local and regional authorities exclusive and delegated powers as well as shared responsibilities with national authorities, including on human rights. The discussions and peer-exchanges among the participants of the workshop contributed to an assessment report on “Human Rights at Local Level in Georgia” being developed by the Congress Secretariat to identify the needs and challenges faced by Georgian local authorities in the realisation of human rights.

D. THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

In June 2020 the Congress has started implementing the new project “Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and consultation of local authorities in the Republic of Moldova” planned until December 2021.

This project addresses one of the key shortcomings highlighted in [Recommendation 436 \(2019\)](#) on local and regional democracy in the Republic of Moldova, namely the lack of consultation of local authorities by higher levels of government. It will pave the way towards improving the dialogue between CALM and the central authorities and establishing an effective consultation mechanism wherein CALM represents the interests of local authorities. The internal organisational change of CALM will be supported through a combination of tools and means which include a baseline assessment of the institutional position of CALM, capacity building activities, peer and knowledge exchange sessions, and facilitated meetings among key stakeholders.

E. UKRAINE

On 12 December 2019, the Congress has signed joint agreements with 13 Ukrainian local authorities to implement local initiatives on ethical, transparent and participatory decision-making; engagement of under-represented groups; and equal opportunities for women and men to participate in local political life.

The local initiatives are an opportunity for mayors to lead concrete actions to improve the quality of local democracy and promote ethical decision-making and more citizen-oriented, inclusive and transparent governance at local level.

Between February and June 2020, a team composed of 13 international and national consultants provided direct support to municipalities. In February 2020, experts visited the municipalities for the first time and continued communicating and working on the implementation of the local initiatives via online tools, given the mobility restrictions linked to COVID-19 pandemic. A videoconference in early March allowed for alignment and co-ordination between the initiatives and led to a series of six thematic webinars between 22 May and 2 June 2020 on citizen participation tools, public ethics and transparency in times of crisis, gender mainstreaming, online communication during pandemics and beyond, value-driven leadership, and monitoring and measuring change.

Also, on 12 December 2019, during the meeting of the Community of practice on local democracy in Ukraine held in Kyiv, the Secretary General underlined the vital contribution that national associations of local and regional authorities can make representing local interests in discussions with the government. Representatives of all five national associations of local and regional authorities of Ukraine gathered together for the first time in years to explore venues for co-operation and establishing an effective consultative mechanism with national authorities. They have exchanged and identified opportunities, challenges and actions needed to create a policy and regulatory framework that reflects the needs of local and regional authorities, as recommended by the Congress in Resolution 437 (2018).

From 28 to 31 January 2020, the Congress organised a training course for young people from the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, in Dnipro, Ukraine. The aim of the course was to equip participants with a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between local democracy and human rights and to

raise their awareness of these issues, so that they can enjoy and fully exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Participants debated with national and international experts on topics such as human rights standards and their local and regional dimension, as well as the roles and responsibilities of local authorities in the involvement of young people. They also debated youth participation with representatives of local authorities, with the objective of encouraging them to be more engaged in local decision-making and local political life. After the course, trainers continued providing distance support to the participants in their efforts to define and present to their respective local authority a project and action plan related to the topics of the training.

On 24 and 25 February 2020, contributing to the Council of Europe Joint Mission to Kyiv (Ukraine), Congress' constitutional advisor prof. Francesco PALERMO, member of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government (GIE), participated in an exchange of views organised in the Verkhovna Rada (Supreme Council of Ukraine) with members of the Parliamentary Committee on State Building, Local Governance, Regional and Urban Development. The discussions focused on the current constitutional reform and consequences for local self-government in Ukraine.

Via Skype call, Mr. PALERMO addressed several issues that are, from the Congress' perspective, fundamental to bring the constitutional amendment under discussion in Ukraine in line with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. He stressed that the regional consultations currently under way in the whole country constitute a new and commendable mechanism for an inclusive process regarding changes at the constitutional level, and existing as well as planned legislation. He pointed nevertheless to the absence of the proportionality principle concerning administrative supervision in the current draft of the constitutional amendment while emphasising the importance of this principle for a meaningful local self-government.

The Congress' expert also proposed that Ukraine could find inspiration in the EU classification system of regions, the so-called "NUTS" (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics), which could be relevant for Ukraine's path towards further co-operation with the European Union.

On 16 June 2020, the Congress held the webinar "Open Government Partnership going local in Ukraine" with the aim to promote the engagement of Ukrainian local authorities in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local programme and to provide participants with practical recommendations and guidance in the preparation of their applications to the programme. 65 Ukrainian local government representatives had the opportunity to learn from and address directly members of the local section of the OGP Secretariat and the OGP International Experts Panel, as well as listen to first-hand experiences on open local government in the City of Buenos Aires (Argentina), the Basque Region (Spain) and the e-Governance Academy of Estonia, which stressed the need to co-create with non-governmental stakeholders to ensure sustainable participatory processes. As a result, Ukrainian local authorities whose local policies are aligned with OGP's strategic and thematic priorities, will consolidate and fine-tune their applications to the OGP Local Programme and further showcase the advance in open local government in Ukraine.

On 2 July the Congress organised a webinar to launch a guide for women and men in local politics on "Preventing and combatting sexism at local level in Ukraine". Participants included local and regional authorities, their national associations, members of the Parliament and the government, and civil society organisations from Ukraine. The guide aims to equip local decision-makers and candidates in Ukraine with the knowledge necessary to recognise and address sexism in their institutions, thereby enhancing women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels. It also contributes to the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy whose first strategic objective is preventing and combatting gender stereotypes and sexism.

F. SOUTH MED PARTNERSHIP

The historic events in the countries of the southern Mediterranean in 2011 paved the way for far-reaching changes in the region, including the start of processes of opening up and democratisation.

In view of the situation and the resulting dynamic, the Council of Europe has conducted a new policy towards its immediate neighbourhood, in particular North Africa, since 2011. The aim of this policy is to enable non-members States of the Council of Europe to benefit from the experience gained in the democratic transition processes in central and Eastern Europe after 1989.

The Congress' cooperation activities with neighbouring countries are carried out within the framework of the Council of Europe's neighbourhood policy.

The South-Med Partnership Programme, launched in February 2017, aims to meet the objectives of the local and regional democracy component of the Council of Europe's neighbourhood policy by supporting ongoing territorial reforms.

The South-Med Partnership is designed as a framework for privileged cooperation with the countries involved. It is politically supervised by two thematic spokespersons.

The Congress wishes to enable its new partners to benefit from its achievements, instruments and experience and to provide a particularly valuable platform for exchanges and encounters both for the countries of the Southern Mediterranean and also for European local and regional authorities. Reinforced dialogue and working relations with local and regional elected representatives from the neighbouring countries will help to promote the Council of Europe's fundamental values, especially regarding local democracy.

Through the South-Med Partnership, local and regional authorities of the countries concerned can benefit from the Congress's expertise and the experience of its members in the following areas:

- *enhancing political dialogue between European elected representatives and their counterparts from the South and increasing decentralised co-operation between local and regional authorities on the two sides of the Mediterranean;*
- *legislative assistance and expertise in the Congress's areas of responsibility, in particular in drafting and implementing legislation relating to decentralisation and local and regional governance;*
- *assisting with the electoral process and, where applicable, observing local and regional elections;*
- *capacity building (especially in terms of leadership) for local and regional elected representatives (and candidates) and their officials through the development of specific awareness-raising and training programmes, with a particular focus on the role of women and young local leaders;*
- *helping to set up/or strengthen associations of local and regional authorities;*
- *supporting the development of participatory democracy, with a particular focus on the role of young people, women and civil society.*

Partner for Local Democracy status

The Congress introduced in 2014, a specific status² for the Council of Europe's neighbouring countries. The Partner for Local Democracy status allows the establishment of a special framework for dialogue and regular institutional contacts between local and regional elected representatives in Council of Europe neighbourhood countries and their European counterparts.

The Partner for Local Democracy status is granted at the request of the countries concerned and is designed as a tool for strengthening good governance at local and regional level. Through their participation in the work of the Congress, the delegations from the beneficiary countries help to promote local democracy not only in their own countries but at pan-European level.

*The **Kingdom of Morocco** and the **Tunisian Republic** were granted the status of Partner for Local Democracy of the Congress on 2 April and 29 October 2019 respectively.*

Morocco

Morocco expressed its desired avenues for cooperation in the framework of the Partner for Local Democracy status in a proposed Memorandum agreed by the Congress Bureau on 28 October 2019.

On 20 December 2019, in Agadir, Vice-President Xavier CADORET during the National Seminar Colloquy on Advanced Regionalisation, declared that the Kingdom of Morocco has already built a solid foundation for regionalisation, notably with the adoption of the organic law in 2015 and the adoption of the National Charter on Administrative Devolution in 2018. This is a process that the Congress has long supported, notably through the South-Mediterranean Partnership and the granting of the status of Partner for Local Democracy. He stressed that this co-operation framework would make it possible to continue the exchange of expertise between European and Moroccan local and regional elected representatives. Based on the discussions held in Agadir, a Congress expert identified key legislative

² [Resolution 376 \(2014\)](#)

areas where Congress assistance is needed and made proposals for priority activities (submitted in January 2020) which was later used as the basis for discussions with associations.

In 2020, the Congress continued to provide its expertise by supporting the creation of two Moroccan national associations' websites: Association of Regions of Morocco (ARM) and Moroccan Association of the Presidents of Prefectural and Provincial Councils (AMPCPP). The objective of this activity is to contribute to strengthening communication capacities of the two associations. This activity resulted in many discussions between a Congress expert mandated for this activity, the service provider and both associations.

Co-operation continued with online meetings between the secretariats of each associations and the Congress to discuss further actions. The associations stressed their needs for trainings and a discussion was organised by the Congress with representatives of the European training organization network for regional and local authorities (ENTO).

Moreover, the Congress agreed to provide its legislative expertise by supporting the AMPCPP in the organisation of a national seminar on competences of prefectural and provincial councils within the Advanced Regionalisation reform. The Congress will provide expert assistance both at the local and international level and participate in such seminar.

Tunisia

On 22 November 2019 in Mahdia, Xavier CADORET spoke at the panel on the role of associations of municipalities, in the framework of the inaugural conference during of the General Assembly of the National Federation of Tunisian Towns and Cities (FNVT). He welcomed the progress made by the Federation, an association that represents all of the country's 350 municipalities, including the vote on the new status of the association and the proposed elections for new governance structures. In fact, associations represent local authorities in the dialogue with other levels of government and act as spokespersons when they participate in consultations. They can also influence national policy formulation, through the sharing of their field experience, and represent the. The status of Partner for Local Democracy granted to Tunisia during the October 2019 session marks the Congress' recognition of Tunisia's efforts to establish genuine local democracy.

On 30 October 2019, Mokhtar HAMMAMI, Tunisian Minister for Local Affairs and the Environment, and Souad BEN ABDERRAHIM, Mayor of Tunis and President of the National Federation of Tunisian Towns and Cities (FNVT), addressed Congress members during a debate on the South Mediterranean Partnership. Speakers in the debate expressed their support for the ongoing reforms in the country, and their hope that co-operation with the Congress would help Tunisia to continue on a democratic course in the years to come. The Minister, considered as one of the main architects of Tunisia's the reform of decentralisation reform, underlined that the granting of Partner status to his country confirms the progress made and supports the continuation of the democratic approach which Tunisia has been pursuing since the 2011 revolution. This led, in particular, to the first local democratic elections in May 2018, during which the 350 municipalities elected, by direct universal suffrage, municipal councils in which women represented 47% of the members. The Minister added that Tunisia also adopted a Code of Local Authorities Charter, inspired by both the country's specific needs and inspired by the experiences shared by its European partners, including the Congress.

The Minister repeatedly stressed the fact that the State would continue to assist municipalities, but that it will no longer exercise any supervision as it had done in the past. In the event of disputes between local elected representatives and the government, it will be up to the independent judiciary to resolve the matter. In addition, Tunisian municipalities were now responsible for developing policies in strategic areas such as sustainable development, the environment, human rights, gender equality and combating violence against women, responsibilities that were previously the sole preserve of the State. Mr HAMMAMI said that co-operation with European and Moroccan local authorities allowed within the framework of the South Mediterranean Partnership will help ensure the continuity of democratic reforms in Tunisia in a very tense regional geopolitical context.

Souad BEN ABDERRAHIM, the first female mayor of the capital Tunis, spoke on behalf of the National Federation of Tunisian Towns and Cities (FNVT and). She stressed the importance of Tunisia's adoption in 2014 of "one of the most forward-looking constitutions in the field of local democracy", in particular Article 139, which made participatory democracy a constituent feature of Tunisian local democracy. On behalf of the FNVT, an association that represents all of the country's municipalities, the mayor of Tunis took the opportunity to extend an invitation to the Congress members to attend the Federation's General Assembly to be held on 22 November in Mahdia. The FNVT's aim was to become

one of the main players in the reform of the devolution process by setting up governance entities involving citizens, civil society and the private sector.

In 2020, the Congress continues its support to the FNVT with a grant to reinforce its capacities by hiring two staff members: A Director and a Policy Officer in charge of relations with the members, advocacy and communication. Moreover, a study on the internal organisation and functioning of associations of local authorities is being prepared by a Congress expert to support the Federation in the reform of its administrative and political structure.

Co-operation also continues with the Centre for Training and Support to Decentralisation (CFAD) on training local elected representatives on local finances, conflict and crisis management, and public ethics.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: 37 TH SESSION (29 – 31 October 2019): AGENDA, SUMMARY OF REPORTS, LIST OF RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS AND ELECTION OF A NEW LEADERSHIP FOR THE CONGRESS

I. Agenda

<https://rm.coe.int/37th-session-of-the-congress-draft-agenda/1680955a9e>

II. Summary of reports

https://search.coe.int/congress/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=0900001680983fb7

III. List of Resolutions and Recommendations adopted

Resolutions:

- RESOLUTION 445 (2019) / 29 OCTOBER 2019
Verification of new members' credentials - Bureau of the Congress - Rapporteur: Michail ANGELOPOULOS, Greece (L, EPP/CCE)
- RESOLUTION 446 (2019) / 29 OCTOBER 2019
Request for Partner for Local Democracy status submitted by the Republic of Tunisia - Bureau of the Congress - Congress Spokespersons on the South-Mediterranean Partnership: Piero FASSINO, Italy (L, SOC) and Constance DE PELICHY, France (L, EPP/CCE)
- RESOLUTION 447 (2019) / 29 OCTOBER 2019
Revision of the Congress Rules and Procedures - Bureau of the Congress - Rapporteurs: Liisa ANSALA, Finland (L, ILDG), Harald SONDEREGGER, Austria (R, EPP/CCE) and Tamar TALIAHVILI, Georgia (R, SOC)
- RESOLUTION 448 (2019) / 29 OCTOBER 2019
The role of local and regional governments in protecting internally displaced persons (IDPs) - Co-Rapporteurs: Marianne HOLLINGER, Switzerland (L, ILDG) and Oleksandr SIENKEVYCH, Ukraine (L, ILDG)
- RESOLUTION 449 (2019) / 29 OCTOBER 2019
Fair distribution of taxes in transfrontier areas - Potential conflicts and possibilities for compromise - Rapporteur: Karl Heinz LAMBERTZ, Belgium (R, SOC)
- RESOLUTION 450 (2019) / 30 OCTOBER 2019
Local elections in Turkey and Mayoral re-run in Istanbul - Rapporteur: Andrew DAWSON, United Kingdom (R, ECR)
- RESOLUTION 451 (2019) / 30 OCTOBER 2019
Congress resolution to endorse the Principles on the Protection and Promotion of the Ombudsman Institution ("The Venice Principles") - Rapporteur: Harald BERGMANN, Netherlands (L, ILDG)
- RESOLUTION 452 (2019) / 30 OCTOBER 2019
Resolution on the revised Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process - Current Affairs Committee - Rapporteur: Thomas ANDERSSON, Sweden (R, ILDG)
- RESOLUTION 453 (2019) / 31 OCTOBER 2019
The use of languages by local and regional authorities - Rapporteur: Andrew DAWSON, United Kingdom (R, ECR)

Recommendations

- RECOMMENDATION 437 (2019) / 29 OCTOBER 2019
The role of local and regional governments in protecting internally displaced persons (IDPs) - Rapporteurs: Marianne HOLLINGER, Switzerland (L, ILDG) and Oleksandr SIENKEVYCH, Ukraine (L, ILDG)
- RECOMMENDATION 438 (2019) / 29 OCTOBER 2019
Fair distribution of taxes in transfrontier areas - Potential conflicts and possibilities for compromise - Rapporteur: Karl Heinz LAMBERTZ, Belgium (R, SOC)
- RECOMMENDATION 439 (2019) / 30 OCTOBER 2019
Local elections in Turkey 31 March 2019 - Rapporteur: Andrew DAWSON, United Kingdom (R, ECR)
- RECOMMENDATION 440 (2019) / 30 OCTOBER 2019
Local and regional democracy in the Russian Federation - Co-rapporteurs: Jakob WIENEN, Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE) and Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG)
- RECOMMENDATION 441 (2019) / 31 OCTOBER 2019
The use of languages by local and regional authorities - Rapporteur: Andrew DAWSON, United Kingdom (R, ECR)
- RECOMMENDATION 442 (2019) / 31 OCTOBER 2019
Local and regional democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Rapporteurs Lelia HUNZIKER, Switzerland (L, SOC) Carla DEJONGHE, Belgium (R, ILDG)

IV. Communication of the President of the Congress, Anders KNAPE, at the 37th Session of the Congress (29 October 2019)

The Council of Europe has experienced an unprecedented political and budgetary crisis in the last few years. The institutional stalemate ended in June and we were pleased to see the Russian delegation return to the Parliamentary Assembly, and the payment by Russia of its contributions to the Organisation's budget.

This difficult context combined with the change in Turkey's status in 2018 and the zero nominal growth policy applied by member states also placed the Congress in a very difficult budgetary position and led us to take cost-saving measures. In the focus group which worked on these measures, consideration was given to the possibility of reducing the number of sessions or the size of delegations, but no consensus was reached on these proposals within the Bureau. We therefore had no other choice but to no longer provide interpretation in the working languages during our statutory meetings. I am well aware, as is the Bureau, that the absence of interpretation in the working languages affects the quality of our work. I regret this situation and I would like to return as soon as possible to a normal functioning for our working languages.

Over the last few years, the share of the Council of Europe budget allocated to the Congress has steadily decreased from 2.92% in 2010 to 2.54% in 2018. The members of the Bureau and I have taken measures, individually and as a group, to persuade the member states to allocate 3% of the Organisation's budget to the Congress in the future; this would enable us to reintroduce interpretation of our proceedings and step up the statutory and thematic activities which we have had to scale back due to the budgetary constraints. During the celebration to mark the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe here in Strasbourg, former Presidents of the Congress decided to send the new Secretary General of the Organisation a message urging her to give the Congress the political priority that it deserves and the resources that it needs to perform its tasks. I am sure that Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ, whom we will have the pleasure of welcoming shortly, will give us an efficient support in this regard.

The political uncertainties regarding the functioning of the Council of Europe have not entirely disappeared, Ukraine, for example, did not appoint a delegation to the June session of the Parliamentary Assembly. The crisis that the Organisation has just experienced has highlighted its structural weakness. The Council of Europe is neither valued nor treated as it should be by the member states. It is therefore not only the Congress which suffers from a lack of recognition from governments, but actually the Council of Europe as a whole.

And yet, our continent needs Europe even more today than it did in the past. At a time when the United Kingdom might leave the European Union without a deal and worryingly unprepared, the dangers which lie in wait for Europe are only increasing. We have worked so hard to establish and move this Europe forward that to see it unravel is heart-breaking.

The challenges ahead of us are colossal. All actors have a role to play, and the Council of Europe is more necessary than ever. During his speech on 1 October, President MACRON said that he sincerely believed that “it is at the Council of Europe that the divisions of our continent can be healed because it is the place where European consciousness is formed and debated”. We therefore truly need a strengthened Council of Europe that enjoys political support.

The Congress is an important part of this mechanism. It plays its role as defender of local democracy. Given the enormous challenges before us as well as the crises of confidence in public discourse and in institutions, the Congress can, together with all players at all levels of governance, help to strengthen the democratic stability of our societies.

In this connection, I would like to commend the democratic process taking place in Tunisia, a neighbouring Mediterranean state. This process is still fragile, but it brings us hope, in an Arab world where most countries have been unable to fully make the shift initiated by the Arab Spring. I therefore welcome all the more warmly the Tunisian delegation to which we have just granted Partner for Local Democracy status.

Dear colleagues, it is through continued work and tireless commitment that we will be convince central governments that the Congress is a key part of the Council of Europe and that it accordingly deserves to have the full support of our member states, as does our entire Organisation.

V. Communication of the President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, Xavier CADORET, at the 37th Session of the Congress (30 October 2019)

Dear colleagues, dear friends, welcome to what promises to be a lively session. A special welcome to our invited speakers.

Today, as we elect a Vice-President to replace the colleague who is leaving us, I am reminded that it was this time last year that I was elected as your president. So today marks the half-way mark, the mid-term of my chairmanship. It is time to take stock. What have we achieved? What is still to do?

In January, in our Bureau, we had a frank and thorough discussion about what our priorities should be. We agreed the monitoring of the Charter and the observation of local elections will continue to be two of the main priorities of this Chamber.

We have had some important missions this year, some difficult election missions and some challenging monitoring missions including in the Russian Federation and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We are also continuing our post-monitoring activities, for example in the Republic of Moldova. This afternoon in the plenary, we will discuss the report on the 2019 local elections in Turkey and the repeat election in Istanbul, a reminder that the work of this Chamber is far too much to fit into one three-hour session.

We also agreed to work on the various issues that are emerging from the development of Smart Cities and the working conditions of mayors in Europe, which we believe are going from bad to worse. Both these issues are on our agenda today.

In our discussion on priorities, we also underlined the importance of working to address the urban-regional divide. In this respect, the Congress is now involved in a major EU project, where we are working with 18 other global partners. We had a first debate on this issue in our last Session in this Chamber in April. The Governance Committee is now preparing a report on this, which should be ready for our session next year. As part of this project we are welcoming, over a three-year period, a series of long-term study visitors, from the other partners in the consortium, to contribute to our work in the secretariat. The second of these, Dr Nicole LIEB, from the University of Munich, is here with us today, the last week of her study visit.

We also agreed to continue our work to restore local democracy in Mostar with the development of a project on encouraging citizen participation in that emblematic city of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There will be a visit of a Congress delegation organised soon to Sarajevo and Mostar in order to prepare a project on the building of democratic participation. This will occur in view of the next local elections to be held in Bosnia and Herzegovina in October 2020. We will try to make concrete proposals as to how

in Mostar, where no local elections have taken place for more than 10 years, next year the voice of the citizens can be heard again.

The general theme of our Congress plenary session is 'Mayors safeguarding democracy'. But where are the mayors? What is happening to our democracy? Our democracy is in danger, it is under threat as never before. Our young people are becoming increasingly disenchanted and disaffected with traditional politics. People of all ages are no longer standing for local election. In Germany we have seen a mayor belonging to a neo-Nazi party being elected unopposed, because the other parties were not in the position to present candidates. How could that happen? Guest speakers will try to explain to us the reasons behind.

People are less and less willing to run for office. They feel that the job is simply not worth the stress and the risks. This is why we decided to organise today's debate on the "Working conditions of local elected representatives – desperately looking for mayoral candidates".

We need to look very carefully at our system of representative democracy. We cannot take it for granted that it will continue to develop and flourish. In more and more of our member states there are warning signs, worrying signals that the whole democratic system is in danger of breaking down.

We recently adopted a report on pay, the financial compensation of elected representatives. Last month the Committee of Ministers adopted a reply to our recommendation, in which they flagged up the importance of (and I quote) "ensuring that the exercise of elected public office at local and regional level is performed in proper financial conditions".

So, the Committee of Ministers is on our side. That is good news. But democracy doesn't come cheap. If we value local and regional elected office, we must be prepared to ensure that there are adequate and attractive working conditions.

Dear friends,

Our world is changing quickly. We will see this clearly in our second debate, which is about Smart Cities and cybersecurity. Who is in charge of these new technologies – we the people or the smart apps? Who is taking the decisions? What happens to all the data being collected about you – who is in control and how to stop it falling into the wrong hands?

We can harness Artificial Intelligence to improve our lives, but it can also be used to undermine democratic processes. This is a real threat to our democracies, a risk to the principles of good governance and to individual freedoms. Democracy rests on transparency, equality and accountability. AI is often hidden and unaccountable. There is already much use of AI in democratic processes. We need to know whether we are talking to a machine or not.

5G technology is now being rolled out in many of our cities. Is it safe? Already there are discussions about the health risks of all this new technology and the huge increase in radio waves and our exposure to them that we are witnessing. With the new technologies come new forms of control, surveillance, forms of manipulation and covert influence. In the hands of the wrong people, these technologies can undermine our democracy and threaten individual human rights and freedoms.

The Council of Europe is at the forefront of the debate and reflection of the issues raised. The Committee of Ministers have just set up a new intergovernmental committee, the Ad hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence, which will hold its first meeting next month. Its task is to examine the feasibility and elements of a legal framework for the development and application of artificial intelligence, based on the Council of Europe's standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The Congress will be involved in this work – which is of immense importance to our authorities.

Ladies and gentlemen, I won't take any more of your time. We are all looking forward to some lively debates and I invite you all to speak up and share your experiences on these big issues. This is your Chamber, let us make the most of this opportunity!

VI. Communication of the 1st Vice-President of the Chamber of Regions, Karl-HEINZ LAMBERTZ, at the 37th Session of the Congress (30 October 2019)

French only

Cher(e)s collègues,

Dans quelques jours, le mois de novembre marquera le 10^e anniversaire du Cadre de référence du Conseil de l'Europe pour la démocratie régionale. Adopté en 2009 par les Ministres responsables des collectivités territoriales, ce document – qui est le résultat d'au moins dix années de travail mené par le Congrès – réaffirme le rôle de la dimension régionale sur notre continent et définit les principes de la gouvernance régionale, ainsi que des relations entre la région et l'Etat.

Aujourd'hui, c'est une bonne occasion de se rappeler que les principes de base de ces relations, affirmés dans le Cadre de référence, sont le respect de l'intégrité territoriale de l'Etat et la loyauté constitutionnelle, ainsi que le dialogue constructif et régulier entre l'Etat et les régions pour relever et affronter les défis auxquels nous sommes confrontés. Les principes contenus dans ce texte demeurent toujours d'actualité, nous rappelant leur importance encore aujourd'hui, surtout aujourd'hui. Nous, les membres de cette Chambre, avons aussi réaffirmé de nouveau l'importance primordiale du dialogue et de la loyauté à la Constitution lors de notre débat sur l'identité régionale et l'intégrité de l'Etat l'année dernière.

Le 10^e anniversaire du Cadre de référence est aussi une bonne occasion pour faire le bilan de l'évolution du régionalisme européen et examiner la direction de son développement et ses perspectives futures. Depuis les années 1970, cette dimension régionale joue un rôle croissant dans la construction de la démocratie européenne, dans la transformation de l'architecture politique et territoriale sur ce continent. Mais cette dimension est elle aussi en transformation permanente.

Notre Chambre a pour vocation de suivre cette évolution, d'identifier les problèmes et d'offrir une vision politique concertée pour des réponses appropriées. Ce rôle de notre Chambre en tant qu'assemblée représentative de toutes les régions d'Europe est encore plus significatif aujourd'hui, à la suite des décisions prises par le Comité des Ministres du Conseil de l'Europe lors de leur Sommet à Helsinki en mai dernier.

Devrais-je vous rappeler que le Congrès, dans sa contribution à ce Sommet, a appelé les Etats membres à reconnaître le rôle crucial de la démocratie territoriale dans la résolution de la crise de confiance et de la crise du fonctionnement des institutions démocratiques qui bouleversent nos sociétés, et dans le renouveau démocratique sur notre continent. Dans cette contribution, nous avons insisté sur le fait que ces collectivités et leurs élus – nous-mêmes, mes cher(e)s collègues, et nos villes, communes et régions – peuvent et doivent devenir le tremplin vers ce renouveau démocratique. Le degré de confiance que nous témoignent nos concitoyens nous permet de fonder de grands espoirs sur la démocratie territoriale, une démocratie proche des besoins et des préoccupations des citoyens.

Les régions d'Europe ont incontestablement un rôle crucial à jouer dans ce renouveau, mais cela signifie aussi que les questions que nous avons posées dans notre contribution à la réunion d'Helsinki s'appliquent tout autant à nos régions, et à nous-mêmes en tant qu'élus politiques au sein de conseils, de parlements et de gouvernements régionaux.

Dans leurs décisions, les Etats membres ont réaffirmé le rôle du Congrès, au sein du Conseil de l'Europe, dans ce processus de renouvellement, et par conséquent le rôle des collectivités dans le maintien du tissu social et dans la restauration du rapport de confiance avec les citoyens.

Au sein du Congrès, il revient à notre Chambre de faire avancer cet agenda dans nos régions et cette session a lieu dans ce contexte historique.

Cher(e)s collègues,

Les défis devant nous, devant nos régions, sont souvent les conséquences directes de la transformation même de notre continent et de notre modèle démocratique. Les structures, les notions et les aspirations qui étaient jadis gelées par la Guerre Froide, se sont mis en mouvement, se sont dynamisées depuis ces dernières décennies.

La dimension régionale n'est pas une exception, remettant en question aujourd'hui la définition même de la région en tant qu'entité territoriale au sein d'un Etat. En effet, la dimension transfrontalière, par exemple, qui prend de l'ampleur dans cette ère de globalisation, et l'intégration européenne offrent des

opportunités de coopération à travers les frontières qui s'estompent de plus en plus, ce qui impacte la configuration même des régions en les transformant en entités transfrontalières voire macro-régionales.

Les relations entre les régions et l'Etat sont également en cours d'évolution face aux défis de l'intégrité et de la cohésion territoriales, nous rappelant, comme je l'ai dit au début, le besoin d'un dialogue permanent et constructif entre la région et l'Etat.

La cohésion territoriale elle-même se trouve sous la pression des tendances économiques et sociales actuelles, mettant en exergue le besoin de revoir nos systèmes de péréquation et distribution des ressources et des responsabilités parmi les régions, et nous rappelant également le besoin d'une coopération accrue entre les régions elles-mêmes – pour assurer une répartition plus équitable des ressources, des services, de la fiscalité et du fardeau financier, tout en tirant profit de l'économie d'échelle, de l'utilisation optimisée des ressources locales et des autres bénéfices offerts par la coopération inter-régionale.

Souvent, les mutations que nous connaissons affectent les liens économiques et sociaux traditionnels au sein des États et tissent de nouveaux liens entre les régions par-delà les frontières nationales. Cette évolution est tout autant porteuse de nouvelles possibilités que de nouveaux défis.

Les changements actuels ont un impact également sur les relations entre la gouvernance régionale et les collectivités locales au sein de nos territoires. Là, aussi, la question de l'intégration territoriale au sein d'une région s'impose face aux disparités croissantes entre les zones métropolisées et non métropolisées – de petites villes, les zones péri-urbaines, rurales et périphériques. Comment assurer une distribution équitable des ressources et des services au sein de nos territoires et arrêter leur « désertification » en faveur des grandes métropoles ?

A cet égard, nous devons examiner davantage les opportunités offertes par les technologies modernes et inclure dans nos stratégies d'intégration territoriale le concept des Régions intelligentes, faisant la connexion avec les Villes intelligentes au sein d'un territoire, dans un réseau intégré. Ceci, bien sûr, doit être inclus dans le contexte des défis posés à la démocratie par l'intelligence artificielle qui deviennent une priorité et qui sont déjà en train d'être adressés par nos partenaires, par exemple, l'Assemblée des régions d'Europe.

Enfin, le défi du développement durable de nos territoires et les conséquences du changement climatique nous obligent à apporter une réponse au niveau régional aussi. L'Agenda 2030 des Nations-Unies et ses Objectifs de Développement Durable, les ODD, fournissent le schéma directeur pour l'action qui, par ailleurs, doit être localisée et régionalisée car c'est à nos collectivités territoriales de mettre en œuvre, au niveau le plus proche du citoyen, les politiques du développement durable.

Cet éventail des défis auxquels nos sociétés, nos démocraties sont confrontées aujourd'hui s'impose à l'agenda de notre Chambre des régions qui se doit d'apporter une contribution appropriée pour les relever.

Je suis confiant que, renforcée par la réforme du Congrès qui je l'espère va trouver enfin une issue au Comité des Ministres, notre Chambre sera à la hauteur de cette tâche.

APPENDIX 2: DECLARATION ON THE IMPACT OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT COVID-MEASURES ON LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

CG-BUR(2020)33-25

The Congress Bureau expresses its concern about the democratic self-governance and financial autonomy of local and regional authorities in Council of Europe member States, in particular in view of recovery plans in the aftermath of the crisis.

It highlights the fact that some governments have imposed, within or outside the context of states of emergency, measures with far-reaching consequences for fundamental rights and freedoms and the democratic functioning which have also impacted the sub-national level - be it through relocation of powers, increase of central states' surveillance or postponement of local and regional elections.

Stressing the crucial role of municipalities and regions in the management of health care, service delivery and awareness of citizens, particularly in major crisis situations, the Bureau underlines the fact that local and regional authorities have been among those most affected by the decline in economic output.

While recognising the special tasks and responsibilities of central governments in crisis situations, the Bureau makes specific reference to the basic principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Governance such as consultation and financial autonomy and urges the national authorities concerned to remove restrictions and restore democratic functioning at the local level, in full compliance with the Charter. Extraordinary measures must always be temporary only and under democratic control.

The Bureau further calls on national authorities to ensure, in the frame of recovery plans, that cities and regions will receive the necessary support to overcome the unprecedented economic downturn stemming from COVID-19 and to become resilient in the face of possible future major crisis situations.

In conclusion, the Bureau emphasises the role of European cities and regions as key partners of national governments for the restoration of the economy, social life and normal democratic functioning at the local and regional level. They must be involved in setting-up mechanisms and procedures for future emergency situations in their role as actors of multi-level governance.

APPENDIX 3: NEW TOOLS

CONGRESS HUB - COVID-19: RESPONSES AT LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS

<https://covid-congress-hub.org/en/>



COVID-19 LOCAL AND REGIONAL RESPONSES CONGRESS HUB

In the face of the COVID-19 crisis, we must act collectively throughout Europe, in a spirit of solidarity that must be expressed at all levels: European, national, local and regional. We must also join our efforts to support local and regional authorities which, because of their special responsibilities and their proximity to citizens, are in the front line in responding to this major crisis.

As a political assembly made up of local and regional elected representatives from 47 Council of Europe member states, the Congress has the capacity to pool the experience of the various players on the ground and the concrete responses implemented by numerous networks and associations of municipalities, towns and regions. This is the aim of this web platform, which will be regularly updated.

RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS

Supporting local and regional authorities

Local and regional authorities are in the front line in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. They are providing emergency services and communicating with citizens on measures to contain the spread of the disease. They coordinate with other levels of governance and other partners in all sectors of society, and also support their counterparts in other jurisdictions, thereby ... [Read more](#)

Ensuring respect for fundamental rights

This crisis not only puts at risk human lives, but also the functioning of our societies and democracies. In a toolkit providing guidance to governments on the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law during the COVID-19 crisis, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejčinović Burić, stressed the need to ensure that the measures taken remain ... [Read more](#)

Relaying the actions of Congress partners

Local and regional authorities urgently need information and resources. National, European and international associations of cities and regions have developed initiatives to share experiences, such as:

- the Action Plan and an exchange platform by the **European Committee of the Regions**
- the experience-sharing campaign by the **Global Parliament of Mayors**
- the repository ... [Read more](#)



REGISTER YOUR CITY, REGION OR NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
In two steps, share the responses developed by your city, region or national association to overcome the COVID crisis19.



TOOLKIT

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejčinović Burić, has issued a toolkit for governments across Europe on respecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law during the COVID-19 crisis.

 [COVID-19 Toolkit](#)
(available in several languages)

CONGRESS AND ITS SECRETARIAT

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Congress has taken several steps to pursue its activities.

 [Functioning of the Congress and its Secretariat](#)

CITIES AND REGIONS

-  **Syndicat des Villes et des Communes Luxembourgeoises (SYVICOL)** 
-  **Republic and Canton of the Jura** 
-  **Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG)** 
-  **Austrian Association of Municipalities** 
-  **Union of Municipalities of Turkey (UMT)** 

All cities and regions

PARTNER NETWORKS

-  **Partners for Local Democracy** 
-  **European Committee of the Regions** 
-  **Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions** 
-  **Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe** 
-  **Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies** 

All partner networks

OTHER RESOURCES

-  **Open Government Partnership** 
-  **Institute of the Regions of Europe - IRE** 
-  **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees** 
-  **Organisation de coopération et de développement économiques (OCDE)** 
-  **European Spatial Planning Observation Network** 

Other resources

CARTA-MONITOR

Database of the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government

<https://www.congress-monitoring.eu/en/>



HOME COUNTRY COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
CONGRESS WEBSITE EN FR

Home

FOREWORD

The [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) lays down standards for protecting the rights of local authorities and requires the 47 member states of the Council of Europe - which have all ratified it - to comply with a number of principles. The voice of municipalities and regions, the [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe](#) is a unique political assembly in Europe responsible for ensuring the proper application of this international convention. This website provides access to the analysis, article by article, carried out during the Congress' monitoring missions in the 47 Member States. It also allows for comparative analysis on several articles and countries, as well as statistical research on ratifications of articles and compliance with their implementation.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BY ARTICLES AND COUNTRIES

Select one or more countries...

Select one or more articles ...

COMPARE

LIST OF COUNTRIES

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|-------------|---------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------|
| | | | | | |
| ALBANIA | ANDORRA | ARMENIA | AUSTRIA | AZERBAIJAN | BELGIUM |
| | | | | | |
| BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA | BULGARIA | CROATIA | CYPRUS | CZECH REPUBLIC | DENMARK |
| | | | | | |
| ESTONIA | FINLAND | FRANCE | GEORGIA | GERMANY | GREECE |
| | | | | | |
| HUNGARY | ICELAND | IRELAND | ITALY | LATVIA | LIECHTENSTEIN |
| | | | | | |
| LITHUANIA | LUXEMBOURG | MALTA | MONACO | MONTENEGRO | NETHERLANDS |
| | | | | | |
| NORTH MACEDONIA | NORWAY | POLAND | PORTUGAL | REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA | ROMANIA |
| | | | | | |
| RUSSIAN FEDERATION | SAN MARINO | SERBIA | SLOVAK REPUBLIC | SLOVENIA | SPAIN |
| | | | | | |
| SWEDEN | SWITZERLAND | TURKEY | UKRAINE | UNITED KINGDOM | |

47 RATIFICATIONS

Opened for signature on 15 October 1985 and entered into force on 1 September 1988, the Charter is ratified by all 47 Council of Europe member states.

- ▶ [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#)
- ▶ [Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority](#)

THE EUROPEAN CHARTER OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Through its core principles to which no reservation is possible, the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ECLSG) seeks to ensure the compatibility of the diverse structures of local communities in the Council of Europe member states. However, the final aim remains the respect of all of the Charter's provisions.

- ▶ [The European Charter of Local Self-Government](#)

MONITORING OF THE CHARTER

Monitoring local and regional democracy is the most emblematic activity of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. The voice of municipalities and regions, the Congress is a unique assembly in Europe responsible for ensuring the proper application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

- ▶ [Monitoring of the Charter](#)

MONITORING COMMITTEE

The Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by member states of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Monitoring Committee) is responsible for assessing the application of the Charter.

- ▶ [Monitoring Committee](#)

CONTACT

Stéphanie Poirat
Monitoring Committee Secretary
[Email](#)
Tel. + 33 3 90 21 51 84

As part of its monitoring of local and regional democracy in Europe, the Congress maintains a regular dialogue with member states of the Council of Europe. The Committee of Ministers, which includes the 47 Foreign Ministers of these states, the Conference of Ministers responsible for local and regional authorities, as well as its Steering Committees are partners in this regard.

Several times a year, the President and the Secretary General of the Congress provide the representatives of the 47 member states in the Committee of Ministers with a record of its activities.



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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all 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 150 000 local and regional authorities.

The Congress

Le Congrès

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE