

Andreas Kiefer

CANDIDATE FOR SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Dear Congress member,

In 2010 and in 2015 the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities elected me as its Secretary General. Members entrusted me with the responsibility to provide leadership and guidance to the colleagues in the secretariat, to manage the financial resources and to achieve the political and thematic objectives defined by the Congress in its priorities. My responsibilities also comprised providing political advice to the Presidents and to the Bureau and representing the Congress within Council of Europe structures and beyond.

The Congress President regularly holds an exchange of views with the Committee of Ministers; it is the role of the Secretary General to complement this political exchange by presenting the concrete work and results of the Congress to the Ambassadors of our 47 member states. The results and activities I have brought to their attention twice a year are your achievements, the work of our assembly of committed elected politicians. The support of a great team of colleagues in the secretariat, committed to the cause of democratic local and regional self-government, has been key in achieving these goals.



CORE BUSINESS AND NEW TERRAIN

In a spirit of constant search for improvements and efficiency, my team and I have put a special focus on the core issues and tasks of the Congress as conferred upon it by the Committee of Ministers. We added new dimensions to the Congress' institutional work and monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, such as the promotion of Human Rights, preventing corruption and the horizontal issues covered by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2013 a new post-monitoring procedure involving political dialogue with national authorities was introduced to give the adopted recommendations a tangible follow-up and in 2014 we created a possibility for meaningful youth participation in our work.

We entered new terrain by starting co-operation activities funded by extra-budgetary resources both in member states and in the countries covered by the policy of the Council of Europe towards neighbouring regions. Since 2012, voluntary contributions from member states and from the European Union amounting to approximately nine million Euros have funded projects and programmes for mayors as leaders of change, public ethics and transparency, gender equality and youth engagement in local public life. The beneficiaries are local and regional elected politicians, municipalities and cities and their national associations in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine as well as in Morocco and Tunisia. These concrete activities complemented the statutory work of the Congress and its three committees. We are particularly proud of the implementation of projects by mayors and councillors and of the establishment of a community of practice on local democracy.

I contributed to raising the profile of the Congress as a forum of exchange and as a monitoring and election observation organ of the Council of Europe. On the ground, the operational secretariat implements projects in the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plans and is highly acknowledged. We successfully reach out to the mayors and councillors, to the members of regional executives and assemblies, in order to cover the local and regional dimension of what the Council of Europe was originally established for: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

MULTILATERALISM AND MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE – DEFENDING DEMOCRATIC LOCAL AND REGIONAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Let us not forget that the Council of Europe was not founded in 1949 to strengthen the role of governments and parliaments. The main reason was to establish a greater European space of democracy, human rights and rule of law and a system of checks and balances in order to protect these values and their beneficiaries – the women, men and children living on European territory. The European Court of Human Rights and a complex system of monitoring bodies aim at protecting the citizens and residents and their rights from the abuse of power of governments and infringements of the conventions adopted by the Council of Europe. One of these rights and a key part of the European model of society is democratic self-government, as enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The Congress was given the responsibility of monitoring the respect of the Charter by the member states and we are performing our monitoring activities in a structured, coherent and transparent manner. In order to continue our core work in times of crises and limited possibilities to travel, we have introduced temporary new methods for remote monitoring activities, observation of electoral processes and fact finding.

Already before the COVID-19 crisis, the Congress had identified a trend towards re-centralisation of competences and the Council of Europe had highlighted threats to fundamental rights such as the freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and the access to free and fair elections. Undoubtedly, there are trends towards nationalism and isolation whose proponents claim that raising walls would solve complex problems and challenges. I am convinced that the challenges our member states are facing, can only be positively addressed through multilateralism, that is co-operation among member states,

and multi-level governance within the countries, that is consultation, exchange, trust and joining forces between national, regional and local politicians and administrations under their respective authority. Elected politicians in municipalities, towns, cities and regions are at the forefront of these challenges. In order to find functioning solutions which are “reality proof”, local and regional authorities must be included in all policy shaping where there is a local and regional dimension. The Congress is the institution in the Council of Europe to push for this. Together with my colleagues in the secretariat I will work to ensure that local and regional authorities are fully associated in the preparation of policies they must put in practice.

While significant progress has been made in improving the living conditions of the populations in many areas, the COVID-19 crisis has confronted European countries with increasing inequalities, which raise questions about the stability and sustainability of our social, economic and political systems and societies. Together with you, I want to develop the capacity of the Congress to address and to respond to the new challenges for citizens and for local self-government and regional democracy.

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence will be increasingly important tools but will never replace the human contact between the people and their elected representatives. Mayors and councillors enjoy the highest level of trust among the population and are the glue of our communities. At the same time, there are fewer and fewer candidates who are available for an elected office. Granting reasonable working conditions for politicians will be a particularly important task in the coming years to secure the functioning of representative democracy.

COMMITTED TO OUR VALUES AND TO THE CONGRESS

With my professional experience, with my international network of senior decision makers, academics and the European and national associations and networks of local and regional authorities, I want to continue to contribute so that the Congress can perform its role as a pan-European forum of political exchange and transfer of know-how. Together with the highly professional team in the secretariat, I want to further develop the Congress as an effective monitoring body and operational actor on the ground and as an important part of the promotion of Council of Europe policies, such as active democratic citizenship, fighting radicalisation and hate speech and making the principles of the European Social Charter a reality at local and regional level.

The imminent implementation of its reforms – after the Congress experienced a phase of unprecedented difficulty – requires a Secretary General with insight and vision, creativity and the ability to anticipate developments, thorough experience, capacity for dialogue and communication, leadership and unwavering commitment to the values of the Council of Europe. The Secretary General of the Congress must enjoy recognition within the Congress and from the decision makers in the Organisation and our external partners and must produce results.

My full commitment to local and regional democracy, as well as my personal background and my professional experience, my loyalty, my sense of responsibility and innovation are the driving forces behind my candidature. I am ready to dedicate all my energy to serving the Congress in further increasing its role, visibility and impact.



November 2020

CURRICULUM VITAE



Andreas Kiefer was born on 6 October 1957 in Salzburg, Austria. He studied Law and Economics at the Universities of Salzburg and Linz and holds a doctorate of Law, as well as a degree in "General Management with a focus on public management" obtained in 2010. In addition to his German mother tongue, he is fluent in English and French.

After jobs in the private sector, he worked as Chef de Cabinet of Land Salzburg's Vice-president and later President Hans Katschthaler (1984–1995) and was Director of the European Affairs Service of Land Salzburg regional government from 1996 to 2010.

From 2000 to 2009 he represented, at expert level, the Austrian Länder in the preparation of the EU's Intergovernmental Conferences (IGC) on the Treaty on a Constitution for Europe and the Lisbon Treaty.

Subsequently he was responsible for setting up the Lisbon-Treaty-based scheme for monitoring subsidiarity and proportionality by the Länder.

He served as Secretary General of the Conference of Presidents of Regions with Legislative Powers (REGLEG) in 2003. His contribution to the creation of the EuRegio Salzburg-Berchtesgadener Land-Traunstein with more than 100 municipalities is a concrete example for applied cross-border co-operation.

Andreas Kiefer served as chairman and member of local electoral committees for municipal, regional, federal and European elections and initiated a citizens' participation project to integrate new residents and to create a municipal mission statement in his home municipality of Kuchl (Dorferneuerung).

He was elected Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on 17 March 2010 and re-elected on 24 March 2015.

Andreas Kiefer has been a speaker at international conferences and universities. He has published about local self-government, regionalism, federalism, interregional and cross-border co-operation, regions with legislative powers, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Committee of the Regions and about the Austrian political system. A comprehensive list can be provided.

He is a member of the Scientific Committee of the Institute for Comparative Federalism of the European Academy of Bozen/Bolzano (eurac research), of the European Association of Researchers on Federalism and was, from 2005 to 2016, member of the Board of the Salzburg Institute for Education (Salzburger Bildungswerk).

Andreas Kiefer is married to Carmen Kiefer, PR Consultant and, since 1999, First Deputy Mayor of the municipality of Kuchl, Austria. They have three adult children.

Contact

Private e-mail address: andreas.kiefer@outlook.com

Office address: Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Avenue de l'Europe, F-67075 Strasbourg,

www.coe.int/congress; e-mail: andreas.kiefer@coe.int