

The Bureau of the Congress

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Co-operation with European associations and organisations

Summary

This document presents an overview of the partnerships presently in place between the Congress and various organisations, examines the potential for synergies and reviews the status of co-operation with each partner and observer organisation during the last five years.

In the light of this information, the Bureau is invited to withdraw guest observer status from organisations originating in non-member States that hold no status with any statutory body of the Council of Europe and with which the Congress has had no recent co-operation.

Action required: for decision

¹ This document is classified confidential until it has been examined by the Bureau of the Congress

Introduction

1. Chapter XVII of the Congress Rules and Procedures sets out several categories of partnership or observer status allowing for participation in the statutory work of the Congress in forms other than that of a national delegation of a Council of Europe member State.
2. To be granted such status, the bodies and representatives concerned must meet certain requirements (set out in Rules 74-75). They must at very least:
 - adhere to / aspire to uphold the values, principles and objectives of the Council of Europe;
 - have expertise in the areas of local and/or regional authorities;
 - commit themselves to promoting the values of the Congress and the Council of Europe;
 - commit themselves to participating in Congress activities and events.
3. Requests for status as a Statutory Partner (Rule 77), Institutional Partner (Rule 78) or Observer Partner (Rule 79) must be made by organisations or associations operating at pan-European level or across several European countries.
4. In addition, the status of Guest Observer (Rule 80) may be granted, on an *ad hoc* basis, to associations representing local and/or regional authorities from territories without a national delegation to the Congress or that are non-European, and which do not fulfil the criteria to be granted one of the above categories of partner or observer status.
5. In all cases, partner or observer status is granted by the Bureau for a renewable period of five years and is automatically renewed unless it has come to the Bureau's attention that the status should be suspended or withdrawn.
6. The Congress has also signed specific co-operation agreements with certain organisations.

Current situation

7. To date the Congress has granted partnership status and/or signed a co-operation agreement with a number of associations and organisations representing local and regional authorities in Europe and beyond, namely the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS), the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA), the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE), the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), as well as some further observer partner and guest observer organisations.
8. Such co-operation aims to create synergies for promoting local and regional democracy, participatory governance, human rights, social inclusion, and sustainable development, while avoiding duplication of efforts. These partnerships also provide visibility for the Congress, facilitate knowledge exchange, and enable the joint development of tools, methodologies, and pilot projects for local and regional authorities.
9. The current situation is summarised in the table below, including where partnership or observer status has been granted with respect to a single chamber and, for organisations not based in Europe, indications as to any partner or observer status of the country concerned with the Council of Europe.

Organisation	Date of Bureau decision	Co-operation agreement	Status of co-operation during last 5 years
Statutory Partners			
Assembly of European Regions (AER)	10/02/2017	Since 24/03/2014	Active co-operation

Organisation	Date of Bureau decision	Co-operation agreement	Status of co-operation during last 5 years
Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)	10/02/2017	n/a	Active co-operation
Institutional Partners			
Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS)	27/03/2017	n/a	Active co-operation
Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)	16/06/2017	n/a	Active co-operation
European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)	18/06/2018	Since 2002	Active co-operation
Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities (CAAC) <i>Institutional partner of the Chamber of Local Authorities</i>	16/06/2017	n/a	No recent co-operation
Observer Partner of the Congress (CoE member States)			
Conference of Outermost Municipalities (CMU)	27/03/2017	n/a	No recent co-operation
Foundation for the Economy and Sustainable Development of the Regions of Europe (FEDRE)	22/03/2022	n/a	Systematic attendance at Congress sessions
Guest Observer with the Congress (non-member State)			
China International Friendship Cities Association (CIFCA)	10/02/2017	n/a	No recent co-operation
Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) <i>Japan has Observer status with the Council of Europe</i>	16/06/2017	n/a	No recent co-operation
Federation of Local Authorities in Israel (FLAI) <i>Israel has Observer status with the Parliamentary Assembly</i>	28/09/2020	n/a	No recent co-operation
Union of Local Self-Government Bodies of the Kyrgyz Republic (Union of LSG KR) <i>Kyrgyzstan has Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly</i>	09/06/2023	n/a	New partner

Organisation	Date of Bureau decision	Co-operation agreement	Status of co-operation during last 5 years
Association of Kosovo* Municipalities (AKM) <i>Guest Observer with the Chamber of Local Authorities</i>	10/02/2017	n/a	Active co-operation
Partners with no status but with active institutional co-operation			
Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE)	No status	Since 17/10/2010	Active co-operation
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)	No status	Since 18/03/2010	Active co-operation
European Committee of the Regions (CoR)	No status	Since 2005	Active co-operation

Proposed action

10. In the light of the above information, it is proposed that the Bureau withdraw guest observer status from organisations originating in non-member States that hold no status with the Council of Europe or any of its statutory bodies and with which the Congress has had no recent co-operation, namely the China International Friendship Cities Association (CIFCA).

11. The Bureau may consider reviewing in the future reviewing the Rules and Procedures of the Congress concerning the granting, renewal, suspension, or withdrawal of partnership or observer status.

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

Appendix

Additional background information on Congress partner / observer organisations

1. Statutory Partners of the Congress (Rule 77)

- **Assembly of European Regions (AER)**

Status with the Congress: Statutory Partner with the Congress (Rule 77) since 10 February 2017. A co-operation agreement was signed with the Congress on 24 March 2014. The Congress is represented in the AER General Assemblies and the Bureau meetings and participates in the major events organised by AER. President: Lukas Mandl.

AER 2025–2030 Priorities — Key Pillars & Implications for Co-operation

Under the new 2025–2030 mandate, AER focuses on three main pillars:

- **Our Democratic Regions** — promoting citizens' participation, democratic values, subsidiarity, good governance, and resilience of regional democratic values, subsidiarity, good governance, and resilience of regional democracies. This aligns well with the Congress' mission to support local/regional democracy, human rights, and multilevel governance.
- **Our Prosperous Regions** — advancing innovation, sustainability, competitiveness, supporting green and economic transitions, sustainable development, and cohesive regional growth. This offers opportunities to coordinate on policies combining territorial cohesion, environmental sustainability, blue/green economy and regional development.
- **Our Inclusive Regions** — fostering social cohesion and equal opportunities, tackling inequalities across income, health, education, housing; strengthening social services; promoting inclusion, accessibility, and equal opportunities for all citizens. This matches Congress' long-standing commitment to inclusion, social rights, and territorial equity.

As a large European network representing regions from 35 countries³, the Assembly of European Regions is an important strategic partner of the Congress, with shared values and principles as enshrined in the Co-operation Agreement signed between the two parties.

The Congress and the AER cooperated in particular on regionalisation issues: i.e. the Congress Reports on regionalisation and the AER Report on the State of Regionalisation in Europe. The Council of Europe "Reference Framework on Regional Democracy" was made available during several AER Assemblies.

With AER's adoption of its new 2025–2030 Political Priorities, the scope and potential for collaboration with the Congress will develop further, with potential topics to include:

- Strengthening regional democracy through enhanced citizen participation, subsidiarity, transparent regional governance, and democratic resilience (especially in times of social or geopolitical stress).
- Promoting sustainable regional development and cohesion policies — combining climate action, environmental sustainability, regional economic competitiveness, rural development, green growth, and innovation.
- Addressing social inequalities and inclusion — focusing on access to public services, healthcare, social protection, housing, equal opportunities, social cohesion, and fighting exclusion or territorial disparities.
- Supporting digital and regional innovation, adaptation to demographic change, and competitiveness of regions — in line with AER's emphasis on innovation and sustainability.
- Joint action on cross-regional and cross-border co-operation, migration integration, youth & education policies, social inclusion, municipal/regional democracy, and other matters.

³ <http://aer.eu/aer-largest-independent-network-regions-wider-europe/>

- **Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)**

Status with the Congress: Statutory Partner with the Congress (Rule 77) since 10 February 2017. No co-operation agreement. The Congress participates in CEMR events of interest on an ad hoc basis. President: Gunn Marit Helgesen.

Thematic Priorities:

1. **Climate:** Accelerate the transformation of territories to achieve net-zero goals, protect biodiversity and adapt to the challenges of climate change. CEMR facilitates the political and technical dialogue between cities, municipalities, regions, and European and international institutions through advocacy, knowledge sharing, and capacity-building activities.
2. **Cohesion:** Foster territorial cohesion and enhance systemic approaches that can break urban-rural silos. CEMR's Cohesion Community serves as a platform for dialogue and collaboration, mobilising political leadership and deepening engagement with aligned organisations and institutions.
3. **Labour:** Bridge the digital divide and make local and regional governments a driver for employment and digital transformation. To strengthen its advocacy and policy work, CEMR builds synergies with organisations and institutions that share its values and long-term objectives in the labour domain.
4. **Society:** Build inclusive, democratic, and trustworthy societies free of inequalities and discrimination. Through advocacy, knowledge sharing, and capacity building, CEMR aims to empower individuals and organisations to make a concrete difference in building inclusive, democratic, and trustworthy societies.

CEMR represents the interests of the associations of local and regional authorities from 42 countries and promotes a united, peaceful and democratic Europe founded on local self-government, the respect for the principle of subsidiarity and the participation of citizens. CEMR is made up of 60 member associations from 41 of the 46 Council of Europe member countries.⁴

Among these, the areas of **governance, democracy and citizenship, economic, social and territorial cohesion**, and **local/regional public services** are particularly relevant for the Congress's mandate.

Recent developments show that co-operation remains active and evolving. Please refer to the Annex for more information.

2. Institutional Partners of the Congress (Rule 78)

- **Network of associations of local authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS)**

Status with the Congress: Institutional Partner with the Congress (Rule 78) since 27 March 2017. No co-operation agreement. The NALAS Secretariat, based in Skopje, is responsible for the overall coordination and the implementation of the activities

NALAS is a network of associations of local authorities of South- East Europe. The Network brings together **13 Associations** which represent roughly **9000 local authorities**, directly elected by more than 80 million citizens of this region.

Key Thematic Areas:

- **Fiscal Decentralisation**

NALAS supports the advocacy efforts of its member Local Government Associations for enhanced fiscal decentralisation reforms via its dedicated **Fiscal Decentralisation Task Force** bringing together local government finance experts and practitioners from each member in the region.

- **Green agenda & Resilience**

NALAS is working on supporting local government associations and its members in realising the green agenda and cities becoming more resilient through many activities, including: Establishment and Promotion of a Help Desk for Covenant of Mayors in the framework of the "EU4 Energy Transition: Covenant of Mayors in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, Learn to be resilient, Disaster Risk Management e-course, etc.

⁴ http://www.ccre.org/en/article/introducing_cemr

- Smart Growth

NALAS is supporting local government authorities in their plans to transform digitally and apply technology and innovation to enhance decision-making and facilitate green, sustainable and inclusive growth. Decentralised co-operation contributes to smart growth of SEE cities and municipalities and to regional cohesion.

- Social Inclusion & Migration

NALAS has several projects that address social inclusion: Social rights for vulnerable groups, scaling up of minorities inclusion models and strengthening of service delivery in municipal structures in the Western Balkans, etc.

Please refer to the Annex for more information on co-operation with NALAS.

- **Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)**

Status with the Congress: Institutional Partner with the Congress (Rule 78) since 16 June 2017. No co-operation agreement. President: Filip Reinhag.

Main areas of work:

- Cohesion Policy is at the core of CPMR's activities. CPMR advocates for a territorial investment policy to reinforce economic, social and territorial cohesion in all regions based on strong multi-level governance arrangements in partnership with regions and their citizens at its core.
- Maritime Policy: The CPMR strongly contributed to the creation of the European Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP) established in 2007. Since then, the CPMR has been supporting efforts to strengthen the governance of the IMP and the "blue growth" approach at European level, as well as in sea-basins via its Geographical Commissions.
- Transport Policy: The CPMR is the only regional organisation in Europe that aims to underline the unquestionable relationship between accessibility and the economic development of our continent and its peripheries, thus enhancing accessibility for those Regions that have geographical handicaps hindering their potential.
- The CPMR also promotes the role of regions in issues related to Migration Management and Gender, particularly the added value of a territorial approach to these issues.

CPMR brings together over 160 regions from 25 states from the European Union and beyond. It represents the interest of maritime regions within the European Union, operating both as a think-tank and lobby for regions. The Association focuses its actions mainly on social, economic and territorial cohesion, maritime policies and blue growth, accessibility, energy and climate.⁵

Common actions with CPMR could be envisaged in promoting increased responsibilities for local and regional authorities regarding reception and integration policies, as well as developing territorial migration and integration strategies based on the principles of multilevel governance.

Please refer to the Annex for more information on co-operation with CPMR.

- **European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)**

Status with the Congress: Institutional Partner with the Congress (Rule 78) since 18 June 2018, Co-operation agreement signed in 2002. The Congress participates in the General Assemblies of ALDA and is member of its Governing Board. President: Pierre Petit.

ALDA is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to the promotion of good governance and citizen participation at the local level. ALDA focuses on activities that facilitate co-operation between local authorities and civil society. Established at the initiative of the Congress, since 1999 ALDA operates in the European Union and in its Neighbourhood. ALDA is a membership based organisation gathering more than 250 members (including local authorities, associations of local authorities and civil society organisations) coming from more than 40 countries.⁶

ALDA Strategy 2024 – 2028 – 7 Thematic Hubs:

⁵ <http://cpmr.org/who-we-are/>

⁶ http://www.alda-europe.eu/newSite/about_us.php

1. Migration: ALDA commits to adopt a specific approach dedicated to supporting the rights of people on the move, newcomers and diasporas as well as the whole recipient community;
2. Gender, Inclusion and Human Rights: The Hub's main pillars are gender equity, fight against discrimination, LGBTQIA+ rights, inclusion & diversity and fair representation;
3. Youth Empowerment and Education: ALDA aims to create a brighter future for Europe and beyond, based on the principles of democracy, solidarity and inclusion, creating a positive and open environment in which young people are able to realise their full potential;
4. Digitalisation and innovation: ALDA is engaged in spreading good practices on digitalisation, as well as fighting the main challenges this phenomenon may present;
5. Practices of citizens participation and community engagement: Through this Hub, ALDA promotes projects and activities which highlight the importance of civic role and contribution in the most relevant environmental and social challenges;
6. Territorial and Local Development: Territorial and local development are crucial for the empowerment of communities, community engagement, economic growth, civic education, conflict resolution and inclusivity;
7. Environment & Climate: ALDA is dedicated to addressing pressing environmental challenges by emphasising the crucial role of citizen participation in shaping sustainable development policies and by pushing forward the relevance of inclusive environmental citizenship.

ALDA **operates numerous projects** in the fields of active citizenship, decentralisation, culture and education, economic development, equal opportunities, migration and integration, good local governance, town twinning, youth, minorities and vulnerable groups, to which the Congress may be associated.

ALDA maintains an extensive network of Local Democracy Agencies, which may also serve as important co-operation partners for Congress activities.

Please refer to the Annex for more information on co-operation with ALDA.

- **The Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities (CAAC)**
(Institutional Partner of the Chamber of Local Authorities)

The Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities, established on 7 July 2000 through the Rennes Declaration, is a non-profit organisation seeking to foster co-operation among cities within the Atlantic arc. Since July 2024, it has been chaired by Inés Rey Garcia, Lady Mayor of A Coruña (Spain). Atlantic Cities represents the voices of **17 member cities** and a population of **over 3 million residents** vis-à-vis the European Union and Atlantic governance bodies.

Status with the Congress: Institutional Partner with the Congress (Rule 78) since 16 June 2017. No co-operation agreement signed.

Connected by a common coastline, the Atlantic Arc cities are attractive, innovative territories which guarantee high living standards on the basis of a large number of economically appealing areas. Located on the periphery of Europe, they have created sturdy diverse cultural identities thanks to the influence of the ocean, a blending of cultures, trade, and migratory movements that have emerged down through the centuries.

They possess a natural and historical heritage which is remarkable, but also fragile and vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The peripheral location of these cities, particularly since the advent of Brexit, represents a major social and economic challenge. The Atlantic Arc cities consider that these issues go beyond the merely local level and call for transnational territorial co-operation to come up with collective answers to all of them.

4 axes of co-operation

- Innovation and research
- Blue growth
- Environment
- Social and cultural dimension

3. **Observer Partner of the Congress (Rule 79)**

- **Confederation of Outermost Municipalities (CMU)**

Status with the Congress: Observer Partner of the Congress (Rule 79) since 16 June 2017. No co-operation agreement signed.

Through CMU, municipalities from European “outermost” regions (which refers to the overseas/remote/peripheral territories/outermost regions of EU member states), also in some cases non-EU territories (e.g. Cape Verde) - engage in exchanges, peer learning, and co-operation on issues such as digital transformation (“smart cities”), inclusion, local democracy, sustainable development, and the localisation of SDGs.

CMU provides a forum for these municipalities to share good practices, innovating in governance, inclusion, and adaptation of global/European policies (e.g. SDGs) to remote territories.

The stated purpose of CMU (on a lobbying-information registry) is to “defend and strengthen the local autonomy of ultra-peripheral municipalities” (i.e. RUPs) in front of national and European institutions.

- **Foundation for the Economy and Sustainable Development of the Regions of Europe (FEDRE)**

FEDRE arose from the first “Economic Forum of the Regions of Europe”, organised in January 1996 by the Chamber of Regions of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (with support from Geneva). The founding act was signed on 25 April 1996 by among others **Claude Haegi** (current President of FEDRE), Yves Berthelot (UN/ECE official), and Daniel Goeudevert, First Vice-Chairman of the International Green Cross and former Chairman of the Board of Directors of Volkswagen, to create a permanent body for regional economic co-operation.

Status with the Congress: Observer Partner of the Congress (Rule 79) since 22 March 2022. No co-operation agreement signed.

FEDRE's Objectives

- To promote the sustainable development of the regions of Eastern, Central and Western Europe, and of the South-Western Mediterranean basin.
- To boost interregional co-operation in Europe, in particular East-West co-operation and that with the South-Western part of the Mediterranean.
- To give rural and urban regions, cities, economic bodies and companies the opportunity to take advantage of FEDRE's network to build partnerships committed to sustainable regional development.
- To provide strategic, legal and technical information for local and regional decision-makers.

FEDRE works on strategic, legal, and technical information for local and regional decision-makers, covering topics such as energy, transport, water and waste management, sustainable development, inter-regional co-operation, cross-border issues.

FEDRE has organised and continues to organise “Economic Forums of the Regions of Europe” which brings together regional stakeholders, local authorities, economic actors, private sector companies, to discuss sustainable development, cross-regional co-operation, environmental sustainability, transport, energy, mobility, etc. Past forums have addressed issues such as “Energy,” “Mobility & Transport,” “Alpine tunnels,” sustainable energy and environment, and capacity-building for regions.

4. **Guest Observer with the Congress (Rule 80)**

- **China International Friendship Cities Association (CIFCA)**

Status with the Congress: Guest Observer Partner of the Congress (Rule 80) since 10 February 2017. No co-operation agreement signed.

The China International Friendship Cities Association (CIFCA) is a national civil organisation of the People's Republic of China. It was set up in Beijing in March 1992 under the sponsorship of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC). It has more than 300 member

cities in China's 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government (not including Taiwan Province, Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions).

The purposes of the CIFCA, a sister organisation of the CPAFFC, are to promote mutual understanding and friendship between Chinese and foreign cities and to conduct exchange and co-operation between them in the economic, scientific and technological, cultural and other fields with a view to advancing social prosperity and progress and safeguarding world peace.

- **Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR)**

Status with the Congress: Guest Observer Partner of the Congress (Rule 80) since 16 June 2017. No co-operation agreement signed. CLAIR's Chairperson of the Board of Directors is Mitsuru Yasuda.

CLAIR is a government-affiliated general incorporated foundation that works to support the internationalisation efforts of local governments in **Japan** through providing training opportunities, fostering people-to-people exchange with the JET Programme and other initiatives, supporting multiculturalism, and by carrying out research on behalf of local governments etc.

The purpose of the association is to offer consistently effective support to their local government stakeholders using the knowhow and extensive international network that they have cultivated over the last 35 years.

- **Federation of Local Authorities in Israel (FLAI)**

Status with the Congress: Guest Observer Partner of the Congress (Rule 80) since 28 September 2020. No co-operation agreement signed. Since 2014, Haim Bibas, Mayor of Modi'in-Maccabim-Reut (in office since 2008), has served as the elected Chairman of the Federation.

The Federation of Local Authorities in Israel (FLAI) is the national umbrella organisation representing all municipalities and local councils across the country. Its core mission is to advocate for local authorities, promote their interests in the Israeli Parliament and government ministries, and strengthen their ability to serve their communities effectively.

Founded in 1938 under the name *Commonwealth of Local Authorities*, FLAI was officially recognised by the British Mandate government as the representative body of Jewish local governments. Since then, it has evolved into a central and inclusive institution that unites **259 local authorities**—including Jewish, Arab, Druze, Circassian, secular, and ultra-Orthodox communities—as well as **54 regional councils** working in full partnership with the Federation.

These local authorities reflect the full spectrum of Israel's diverse society and geography, from central urban centres to peripheral towns and rural regions.

- **Union of Local Self-Government Bodies of the Kyrgyz Republic (Union of LSG KR)**

Status with the Congress: Guest Observer Partner of the Congress (Rule 80) since 9 June 2023. No co-operation agreement signed.

The Union of LSGs of the Kyrgyz Republic unites 31 urban and 453 rural municipalities of Kyrgyzstan. The highest body is the General Assembly. The Board represents the General Assembly of the Union of LSGs of the Kyrgyz Republic in the period between its meetings and consists of representatives of at least 9 members of the Union, representing all regions and the cities of Bishkek and Osh.

- **Association of Kosovo* Municipalities (AKM)**
(Guest Observer with the Chamber of Local Authorities)

Status with the Congress: Guest Observer with the Chamber of Local Authorities (Rule 80) since 10 February 2017.

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

The Association of Kosovo Municipalities (AKM) was established in 2001 after the first democratic municipal elections after the war in Kosovo. Establishment of the Association of Kosovo Municipalities relies on Section 10 of European Charter for Local Autonomy of Council of Europe (the right to association). The AKM is a not-for-profit organisation with legal personality representing the general interests of its members-local authorities. Members of the association are local authorities in Kosovo.

The AKM is an implementing partner in the Congress project **Strengthening Multilevel Governance and Participatory Democracy**. This ongoing project aims to enhance co-operation between central and local authorities in advancing local self-government reform and improving participatory democracy. It focuses on assessing the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, strengthening municipal capacities in open government areas such as digital governance, open data, public participation and anti-corruption, and creating a Forum of Exchange for joint problem-solving.

5. Partners with no Status but with active Institutional Co-operation.

- **Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE)**

Status with the Congress: A co-operation agreement with the Congress was signed on 17 September 2010. The Congress attends the General Assemblies and the Standing Committee meetings of CALRE. President Astrid Pérez (President of the Parliament of the Canary Islands) was elected in January 2025.

CALRE unites presidents of regional legislative assemblies from six European countries in its effort to grant a place and European role to regional parliaments: the parliaments of the Spanish communities, the Italian regional councils, the federated states of Germany and Austria, the Portuguese regions of Açores and Madeira, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom, Åland Islands in Finland and the community and regional chambers of Belgium.⁸

Under the new presidency, CALRE's 2025-2028 working agenda includes renewed emphasis on social cohesion, territorial equality, inclusion of peripheral and outermost regions, regional identity, and the protection of regional interests in EU-wide decision-making.

Several of its working groups remain highly relevant for the Congress — including those focusing on Migration Policies, e-Democracy & Artificial Intelligence, Health & Social Policy, Subsidiarity and Regional Autonomy, Equality & Gender Policies, and Inclusion of Outer and Remote Regions.

- **Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)**

Status with the Congress: A co-operation agreement was signed between the Congress and the AEBR on 18 March 2010. The Congress is represented in the AEBR General Assemblies, as well as at numerous relevant conferences, some of which were co-organised by the Congress. President Joris Bengevoord.

With 100 members (European border and cross-border regions), the AEBR is a forum for cross-border co-operation and strives for making the voice of the border and cross-border regions heard at European level. The mission of AEBR is to highlight special problems, opportunities and responsibilities of border and cross-border regions in Europe, to represent their common interests at national and international level, as well as to promote interregional co-operation and the exchange of experience.⁹

To achieve its mission, AEBR:

- Represents the interests of border and cross-border regions vis-à-vis European institutions, national and regional authorities;
- Implements programmes and projects targeted at facilitating and supporting CBC;
- Promotes exchanges of information and experiences between them and identifies and coordinates common interests among the diverse range of cross-border problems and opportunities, proposing possible solutions;
- Organises events to raise awareness of cross-border obstacles and to promote the exchange of good practices and information;

⁸ <http://www.calre.net.eu/what-is-calre/>

⁹ http://www.aebr.eu/en/profile/aims_tasks.php

- Prepares, coordinates and implements joint campaigns aimed at raising awareness of CBC-related issues;
- Advises institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe and informs political bodies and the public about cross-border matters.

The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) remains an important partner for the Congress in promoting cross-border co-operation, local and regional democracy, and multilevel governance. For more information on co-operation with the AERBR, please refer to the Annex.

- **European Committee of the Regions (CoR)**

Status with the Congress: A co-operation agreement was signed in 2005 by the Congress and the Committee of the Regions of the European Union. The fields of interest and methods of co-operation of the two institutions were formalised in 2009 **and revised in 2018**.

Priorities for co-operation stated in the agreement:

- With EU member states: focus on promoting the principles of the Charter of Local Self-Government and their implementation
- Non-EU member states: focus on the EU's Eastern Partnership Programme and the Union for the Mediterranean and areas of mutual interest with regard to candidate and potential candidate countries for EU membership

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is the voice of regions and cities in the European Union (EU). It represents local and regional authorities across the European Union and advises on new laws that have an impact on regions and cities.

The CoR works on all EU policies and implements them at the territorial level. It works on good governance, territorial cohesion, economy, environment, natural resources, social, education and culture⁸.

Political priorities: Bringing Europe closer to people through its villages, cities and regions has been the primary mission of the CoR achieved through three main political priorities (2020 – 2025):

- Priority 1: Bringing Europe closer to people: Democracy and the future of the EU.
- Priority 2: Managing fundamental societal transformations: Building resilient regional and local communities.
- Priority 3: Cohesion, our fundamental value: Place-based EU policies.

In addition, the CoR has 4 thematic priorities: EU Democracy, Cohesion, Green Deal, Solidarity with Ukraine

Networks and co-operation:

- CoR Networks: Better Regulation and Active Subsidiarity Steering Group (BRASS-G) / Cities and Regions for Integration of Migrants / EU Local Councillors Network / European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine / etc.
- CoR International co-operation: The Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) / Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) / Libya – Nicosia Initiative / etc.
- Interinstitutional Co-operation with other EU institutions.

The Congress and the Committee of the Regions meet annually as a **High-Level Group**, composed of the President of the Congress, the Presidents of its two Chambers, the President of the Committee of the Regions as well as its 1st Vice-President and President of the CIVEX. The Group maintains the dialogue between the two institutions and sets the thematic priorities for co-operation. 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. The last HLG meeting took place on 12 February 2024.