

The Bureau of the Congress

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Co-operation activities of the Congress in member States and neighbouring regions

Developments between 17 October 2019 and 29 May 2020

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¹ This document is classified confidential until its examination by the Bureau of the Congress.

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Introduction

This document provides a **brief update on the main results** attained by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (the Congress) in member states of the Council of Europe between **October 2019 and May 2020**. Co-operation projects take place in the framework of bilateral agreements through country-specific Action Plans or within the policy towards neighbouring regions.¹ The Congress develops a full report of its co-operation activities every year in October² based on its *Guidelines for co-operation activities*.³

Through co-operation projects the Congress provides **practical support** to address shortcomings of local democracy identified by the various monitoring bodies of the Council of Europe and Congress thematic and monitoring recommendations on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

Through its widely recognised **expertise and experience in local and regional democracy**, the Congress is in a key position to support local and regional authorities and their associations in acquiring new skills and knowledge and strengthening their institutional capacities. The Congress provides a valuable platform for local and regional authorities to come together and share innovative best practices and lessons learnt. The rich expertise of Congress members is employed in **peer-to-peer learning** to support effective capacity-building.

Thematic priorities for co-operation include:

- empowering local and regional authorities by fostering dialogue with the central government, and strengthening their associations;
- reinforcing the capacities of local and regional elected representatives as agents of change;
- raising young people's awareness of the principles of local democracy, and engaging them at local level;
- learning by doing through involvement in local initiatives aimed at improving governance, including through citizen participation.

The co-operation activities of the Congress include a human rights approach with a focus on gender equality and the integration and protection of internally displaced persons and minorities. The aim is to strengthen the capacities of local and regional authorities in mainstreaming and protecting human rights at local level in line with Congress priorities for 2018-2020.⁴

Recent developments

The Congress has six ongoing projects and is preparing three others. Bilateral co-operation projects are in progress in Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (with a specific focus on Mostar), the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. A new project should be launched in July 2020 in Kosovo⁵. Moreover, within the Council of Europe Policy towards neighbouring regions the Congress is implementing co-operation activities in Tunisia and Morocco. The Congress is also preparing projects in Albania and Georgia. Another project proposal has been submitted for funding under the Council of Europe Action Plan for Belarus 2019-2021.⁶

I. Bilateral projects implemented in the Council of Europe member states

Ongoing projects

Ukraine

Project title	Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine
Dates	July 2018 – February 2021
Budget	€ 1 600 000
Funding	Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021 ⁷
Project summary	The project aims to improve the quality of local democracy in Ukraine by strengthening institutional frameworks and by supporting local authorities and their national associations to promote ethical decision-making and build more citizen-oriented, inclusive and transparent local governance.

The **Community of practice on Local Democracy in Ukraine** was established in 2019 to reinforce the capacities and institutional position of Ukrainian local and regional authorities and their national associations. It aims to enhance advocacy on issues of common concern in a context of local self-government reform. The discussion in December 2019 between representatives of all national associations of local and regional authorities of Ukraine contributed to identifying opportunities and actions needed to establish an institutionalised mechanism of consultation between local and central authorities, as per the provisions of the European Charter on Local Self-Government.⁸

The **strategic orientation** of the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) was discussed, from October 2019 to February 2020, through a highly participatory process that brought together mayors from all 24 regions of Ukraine to agree on a common vision, strategic priorities and the overall future of the Association.

As part of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Congress and the AUC, a **grant agreement** was signed in January 2020 to support the AUC's analytical capacities, strengthen advocacy and communication, and mainstream gender equality in all its activities. In addition, the Congress Secretariat is assisting Ukrainian local authorities in improving the legislative framework for decentralisation and local self-government in Ukraine by providing **expert support** to the AUC in relation to the draft laws of Ukraine "On the Capital of Ukraine – Hero City Kyiv" and "On Amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine".

13 Ukrainian local authorities signed joint agreements with the Congress on 12 December 2019 to implement local initiatives on: [1] ethical, transparent and participatory decision-making; [2] engagement of under-represented groups; and [3] equal opportunities for women and men to participate in local political life. Through such concrete initiatives, mayors are improving the quality of democracy and governance at local level, bringing positive change to Ukrainian citizens and communities. To further support the implementation of the 13 local initiatives and address topical challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Congress held a series of six online webinars between 22 May and 2 June to guide Ukrainian local authorities towards an integrated approach to public ethics, transparency and inclusiveness. These measures complement the efforts of the Congress to establish a reliable and efficient local self-government in Ukraine.

20 young people from the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in Eastern Ukraine participated in a **training on human rights and local democracy** on 27-31 January 2020 in Dnipro. The participants, who are currently undertaking vocational studies, learnt about good practices on youth participation at local level, developed short action plans for getting involved in decision-making in their communities, and exchanged with representatives of local authorities in Ukraine.

In addition, to support Ukrainian authorities in mainstreaming gender equality at local level, the project facilitated the participation of Congress member Gudrun MÖSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM (Austria, SOC/G/PD) in the third edition of the **Ukrainian Women's Congress** (10-11 December 2019), an ongoing public platform which shapes the gender policy agenda for the Ukrainian Parliament, Government, civil society and media.

Armenia

Project title	Strengthening the Communities Association of Armenia and transparent, participatory local governance in Armenia
Dates	July 2019 – June 2022
Budget	€ 900 000
Funding	Switzerland
Project summary	The project aims to enhance the quality of local democracy in Armenia and improve citizen trust in local authorities. It supports the Communities Association of Armenia in the execution of its mandate and in representing the interests of local authorities towards the Government. The project also works to improve the transparency and accountability of local government and to support it in applying citizen participation mechanisms.

The project, in its component on public ethics, transparency and accountability, conducted a **corruption risk assessment at local level** in partnership with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, the Ministry of Justice, the Open Government secretariat and the NGOs Coalition against Corruption.

A **Community of practice on political integrity in local governance** was established and will act as the focal group for adopting national integrity and anti-corruption policies and measures at the local level. It will support local authorities in implementing Congress recommendations aimed at achieving transparency, lowering corruption and stimulating greater citizens engagement. A first meeting was organised on 5 March 2020 with the participation of 23 selected communities.

The project is also supporting 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. Worthy of highlighting is that the CAA has issued its first "Annual report on the state of decentralisation" with its own resources. It intends to use it as a regular tool for the initiation of a regular dialogue with national authorities. The CAA discussed the findings with its member communities and representatives of relevant ministries in February 2020.

New projects

Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mostar)

Project title	Building Democratic Participation in the City of Mostar
Dates	February 2020 – December 2021
Budget	€ 500 000
Funding	Norway

Project summary The project addresses the political deadlock and entrenched division fuelled by the absence of elections in the city of Mostar for the past 11 years. It aims to create opportunities for citizens to engage in the deliberative process in order to increase their influence on local decision-making. In parallel to building the skills of local stakeholders in democratic governance, the project will support the discussion on representative democracy and electoral systems in view of holding local elections in Mostar.

This new project follows on from the work of the Reflection Group on Mostar (RGM) that was created in 2017 by the Congress to propose a sustainable solution for restoring local democracy in Mostar where no local elections have been held since 2008. The RGM proposed employing new forms of public deliberation that place citizens representing different ethnic and religious backgrounds at the heart of local decision-making for paving the way towards the electoral process in Mostar. These will be complemented by capacity-building activities and dialogue among local stakeholders with expertise and support provided in close cooperation with the Venice Commission.

Republic of Moldova

Project title Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and consultation of local authorities in the Republic of Moldova – Phase I

Dates June 2020 – December 2020

Budget € 175 000

Funding Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2017-2020⁹

Project summary The project will contribute to strengthening the institutional position and capacities of the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM) in areas such as policy dialogue and advocacy, good governance and municipal management standards, and provision of quality services to its members. The project will assess the organisational capacities and institutional position of CALM, including its relationship with the central authorities, as a basis for the development of its future strategic orientation.

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

II. Co-operation activities as part of the Council of Europe's policy towards neighbouring countries

Morocco

Project title	Strengthening democratic governance and local and regional level in Morocco
Dates	April 2019 – December 2021
Budget	€ 294 000 (funding secured until 28 February 2021)
Funding	Multiple donors funding the Council of Europe Neighbourhood Partnership with Morocco ¹⁰
Project summary	The project aims to provide assistance with the regionalisation process, strengthen the institutional capacities and advocacy skills of the associations of local and regional authorities, raise awareness of the role and responsibilities of local and regional elected representatives, and promote participatory democracy at local and regional levels. Special attention is paid to cross-cutting aspects, such as the gender dimension and civil society involvement.

Morocco was granted Partner for Local Democracy status with the Congress on the 2 April 2019.¹¹ The status allows for the participation of a delegation of Moroccan local elected representatives in the Congress events and provides opportunities for peer-to-peer exchange with the members of the Congress.

In consultation with the government, the associations of local and regional authorities elaborated a **co-operation priorities document**, submitted as a Memorandum to the Congress Bureau, stressing that the Congress expertise should help building a sustainable dialogue mechanism between the central, regional and local levels of government. In addition, as from March 2020, expert support has been provided to develop websites for the associations in order to strengthen their communication capacity for the public and their members.

The participation of Congress Vice-President Xavier CADORET in the first Colloquy on regionalisation in Agadir on 20-21 December 2019 resulted in the preparation of a detailed proposal for strengthening cooperation between all stakeholders of the project.

Tunisia

Project title	Promoting local governance in Tunisia
Dates	April 2019 – December 2021
Budget	€ 346 000 (funding secured until 28 February 2021)
Funding	Multiple donors funding the Council of Europe Neighbourhood Partnership with Tunisia ¹²
Project summary	The project aims to support the implementation of the decentralisation reform in Tunisia. The focus is on supporting the legal framework for decentralisation (decrees of implementation of the Code), reinforcing the capacities and the advocacy role of the National Federation of Tunisian Towns (FNVT) as a strong and legitimate representative of all municipalities; and providing support and tools for the establishment of fair, transparent and participatory democracy at local level.

Tunisia was granted Partner for Local Democracy status with the Congress on 29 October 2019.¹³ The status allows for the participation of a delegation of Tunisian local elected representatives in the Congress events and provides opportunities for peer-to-peer exchange with the members of the Congress.

The project ensured close cooperation with the National Federation of Tunisian Towns (FNVT) through the participation of the Congress Vice-President in the General Assembly of the Association in November 2019. Moreover, expert support was provided to FNVT in three priority areas: the organisation and work of the FNVT's thematic committees; reinforcement of advocacy skills; and development of the consultation process. A grant agreement was signed in April 2020 to strengthen the FNVT's secretariat in developing institutional capacities in advocacy, communication and relations with member communities.

Notes

¹ Activities organised under this policy have been implemented following the creation by the Congress of the status of Partner for Local Democracy in 2014. For the policy see "Report on the implementation of the Council of Europe Policy towards neighbouring regions", CM(2017)27-final, Bureau of Ministers, 19 May 2017. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680712371>. For the status see Resolution 376 (2014) Partner for Local Democracy status. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680719fb5>.

² Latest full report on "Co-operation activities of the Congress in member states and neighbouring regions", CG/BUR29(2019)INF57, Bureau of the Congress, 17 October 2019. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/co-operation-activities>.

³ "Improving the impact of Congress recommendations: Guidelines for co-operation activities in Council of Europe member States", CG/BUR/2015(27)31, Bureau of the Congress, 23 March 2015. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168071a684>.

⁴ The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities at the Council of Europe, "Priorities of the Congress 2017-2020". Available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/priorities-of-the-congress>.

⁵ (*) 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.

⁶ Projects within the Action Plan are to be funded from multiple sources, including Joint Programmes with the European Union, voluntary contributions from donor countries and international organisations, as well as the ordinary budget of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe Action Plan for Belarus 2019-2021 is available at: <https://rm.coe.int/ap-belarus-2019-2021-web-en/168098f1bd>.

⁷ The Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021 is funded by 17 member States: Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey. The Action Plan is available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168078b606>.

⁸ Resolution 437 (2018) on the consultation of local authorities by higher levels of government. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/16808d3c72>.

⁹ The Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2017-2020 is funded by 7 member States: Bulgaria, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Norway, Romania, Sweden and Switzerland. The Action Plan is available at: <https://rm.coe.int/16806cd3a5>

¹⁰ The Neighbourhood Partnership with Morocco 2018-2021 document available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/programmes/morocco>.

¹¹ The Congress granted the Morocco the status of Partner for Local Democracy through the Resolution 440 (2019) debated and adopted by the Congress on 2 April 2019, 1st sitting. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/request-for-partner-for-local-democracy-status-submitted-by-the-kingdo/168093c236>

¹² The Neighbourhood Partnership with Tunisia 2018-2021 document available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/programmes/tunisia>.

¹³ The Congress granted the Tunisia the status of Partner for Local Democracy through the Resolution 446 (2019) debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 October 2019, 1st sitting. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/request-for-partner-for-local-democracy-status-submitted-by-the-republ/1680989784>