

44th SESSION

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**44th SESSION****The anniversary of Russia's war against Ukraine**

Declaration 6 (2023)<sup>1</sup>

1. February 24, 2023, marks one year since Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in defiance of international law and the core values on which the member States of the Council of Europe are built.
2. Russia's ruthless war continues to claim tens of thousands of innocent lives and cause massive destruction across the whole of Ukraine, forcing millions of people from their homes and spreading violence and disinformation, with dramatic long-term repercussions on cities and communities in Ukraine and worldwide.
3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities therefore joins the international community's call for Russia to end its unjustified and unprovoked war against Ukraine and withdraw its troops from the territory of Ukraine immediately, fully and unconditionally.
4. The Congress, furthermore:
  - a. deplores and most emphatically condemns the horrific acts of abduction, torture, deliberate targeting and killing of innocent civilians, children, and locally elected representatives, the calculated destruction of civilian infrastructure, unlawful deportation of Ukrainians, forced so-called Russianisation of Ukrainian children, instrumentalisation of sexual violence, and other war crimes as well as acts of possible genocide that have been committed by Russian forces;
  - b. expresses its deep admiration for the extraordinary courage of the Ukrainians who are relentlessly defending their country against the aggressor State, from the battlefield to the home front. Ukrainian towns, cities and regions, and their elected leaders and other representatives of local and regional authorities, are acting like a veritable "second army" and proving their great resilience in the face of the tragedy of war;
  - c. pays tribute to the key role that local and regional authorities in Ukraine have been playing in addressing the disastrous humanitarian consequences faced by their citizens and the cohesion and support they have shown one another;
  - d. commends the solidarity and unity of Europeans, their cities and municipalities which have welcomed millions of people fleeing the war against Ukraine and provided assistance and support to meet their needs from the outset of the Russian invasion, and calls for this support to be maintained and increased in order to help Ukraine to defend itself and its people;
  - e. calls on European cities and regions to continue mobilising and providing large-scale financial, security and humanitarian assistance to their Ukrainian counterparts, including through online initiatives such as the Congress-sponsored Cities4Cities/United4Ukraine platform and invites European cities and regions to explore possibilities to establish multi-faceted partnerships with Ukrainian cities and regions, ideally with a long-term vision;

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<sup>1</sup> Debated and adopted by the Congress on 21 March 2023, 1st sitting, rapporteur: Leen VERBEEK, Netherlands (R, SOC/G/PD).

*f.* emphasizes that direct personal relations between cities can play a role in fighting disinformation, as false information from unclear sources in social media makes it difficult to assess situations objectively;

*g.* highlights the critical importance of seeking justice for victims and holding Russia accountable for its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine. It supports, in line with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the creation of a special international tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine and the setting up of an international compensation mechanism for the injury, damage and loss incurred by the State of Ukraine as well as natural and legal persons in Ukraine;

*h.* supports Ukraine in its accession process to the European Union and expresses its readiness to assist Ukraine in its reform efforts in this respect;

*i.* firmly believes that Ukraine's decentralisation and local self-government reform significantly contributes to its resilience at local and regional levels. It therefore underlines the importance of continuing the reform process during the post-war recovery to further deepen local and regional democracy;

*j.* pledges to continue its efforts to contribute to strengthening municipal and regional activities, multi-level governance and fostering strong and resilient cities and communities in Ukraine;

*k.* affirms, as it has done since the first day of the Russian invasion, its unwavering solidarity with Ukraine, its people and communities, as well as its resolute support for Ukraine's sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. It does not recognise the attempted illegal annexation by Russia of any parts of Ukraine's territories;

5. The Congress stands by the Ukrainian people at this historically decisive time for Ukraine and the world and believes in a common, democratic future based on respect for international law and a just peace.

## 44th SESSION

**Regional Council and District Assembly Elections in Berlin, Germany (12 February 2023)**

Recommendation 489 (2023)<sup>1</sup>

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities refers to:

a. Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Committee of Ministers' Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;

b. Chapter XIX of the Rules and Procedures on the practical organisation of election observation missions;

c. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) which was ratified by Germany on 17 May 1988;

d. the invitation by the Election Officer of the *Land* of Berlin dated 7 December 2022, to observe the regional council and district assembly elections scheduled for 12 February 2023 in Berlin.

2. The Congress reiterates the fact that genuinely democratic local and regional elections are part of a process to establish and maintain democratic governance and that observation of grassroots elections is a key element in the Congress' role as guardian of democracy at local and regional levels.

3. The Congress acknowledges the fact that, overall, the legal framework is conducive to holding democratic elections.

4. The Congress notes with satisfaction that:

a. overall, the authorities, contestants and voters welcomed the decision of the Berlin Constitutional Court to repeat the elections of 26 September 2021, underlining the importance of efficient and independent judicial reviews and appeal mechanisms;

b. the preparations for the repeat elections were conducted efficiently by a highly decentralised and more coordinated election administration, despite the short timeframe, and additional measures were adopted to strengthen the capacity of the Electoral Board members and to provide sufficient ballot booths and papers;

c. the campaign was competitive and focused on issues of local and regional relevance and voters were presented with a wide range of programmes;

d. the Election Day was conducted in line with the relevant legal provisions and was calm, orderly, and managed by a highly professional and committed staff. Counting was handled with diligence, rigour and speed;

<sup>1</sup> Debated and adopted by the Congress on 21 March 2023, 1st sitting (see Document [CG\(2023\)44-14](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Vladimir PREBILIC, Slovenia (L, SOC/G/PD).

e. the trust of the voters in the electoral process remained rather unspoiled, as evidenced by the relatively good turnout and the very few domestic or international observers deployed in polling stations.

5. At the same time, the Congress notes with concern the following issues:

a. the unclear division of competences and responsibilities between the *Land* Returning Officer, the District Returning Officers and their administrations;

b. some of the procedures on Election Day not being uniform and standardised across all districts including:

i. ballot boxes not being uniform and locked and/or sealed in a unified and tamper-proof manner;

ii. voter identification being checked sometimes before and other times after filling the ballot and voters not being asked to sign the voters register;

iii. excessive burden being placed on Election Board Chairpersons to handle the transportation, storage and safety of the voting material on the eve of the Election Day;

iv. the lack of requirement for Election Board Chairpersons and other members, to follow a standardised training, which is only strongly encouraged, or to attest of past experience;

c. the absence of a cap for campaign expenses and of a dedicated and timely campaign finance report, as well as the high amount for disclosure of private donations, which are not conducive to a level playing field between contestants and limit transparency and accountability;

d. the lack of regulation related to quotas on lists and for directly elected seats leading to great variations of the number of women elected per party, and excessively low percentage for some;

e. in some polling stations, the limited accessibility for voters with disabilities, with Election Board members having to assist voters to access the premises;

f. the absence of a legal basis for domestic, international or partisan election observation, despite legal provisions guaranteeing public access to polling stations and counting procedures;

g. the repeat elections imposed a heavy financial and organisational burden on political subjects, predominantly affecting the smaller parties.

6. In light of the above, the Congress invites the relevant authorities in particular, to:

a. revise the legal framework to clarify the tasks and responsibilities of *Land* and District Returning Officers and their administrations and to entrust the *Land* Returning Officer with additional coordination and oversight powers to enforce uniform procedures across districts of Berlin;

b. consider the introduction of a standardised training for Election Board Chairpersons and other members and of further consistent safeguards with regard to the Election Day procedures, in particular on the storage and transportation of voting material, on the use of uniform ballot boxes, preferably transparent, and tamper-proof seals, and on the signing of registers by voters;

c. strengthen the regulatory framework ensuring transparency and accountability of campaign and party finances, in particular on the introduction of a spending cap, a campaign report and lower threshold for disclosure of donations;

d. introduce a 40% quota and additional provisions to strengthen the participation of women in local and regional politics, regardless of political parties' internal rules;

e. pursue efforts to make all polling stations accessible to people with disabilities, regardless of other alternatives to in-person voting;

f. adopt legislation on the rights and status of domestic, international or partisan election observers in line with Article 8 of the OSCE Copenhagen Document.

7. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and other relevant institutions of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation regarding the 2023 repeat elections in the *Land* of Berlin and of the explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.





## Local elections in the Republic of Slovenia (20 November 2022)

Recommendation 490 (2023)<sup>1</sup>

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities refers to:

a. Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Committee of Ministers' Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;

b. Chapter XIX of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress on the practical organisation of election observation missions;

c. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) which was ratified by Slovenia in 1996;

d. previous Congress Report CPL36(2019)02 on the Ad-hoc assessment mission on the local elections in the Republic of Slovenia (18 November 2018);

e. the invitation by the Minister of Public Administration of the Republic of Slovenia dated 21 July 2022, to observe the local and regional elections scheduled for 20 November 2022 in Slovenia.

2. The Congress reiterates the fact that genuinely democratic local and regional elections are part of a process to establish and maintain democratic governance and that observation of grassroots elections is a key element in the Congress' role as guardian of democracy at local and regional level.

3. The Congress acknowledges that, overall, the legal framework is conducive to holding democratic elections.

4. The Congress notes with satisfaction that:

a. the preparations for local elections were conducted efficiently by a highly decentralised election administration;

b. the Election Day was calm, peaceful and orderly, with citizens and contestants alike showing a high level of public trust in the election administration;

c. the campaign focused mainly on local issues, which exemplified the vivid local democracy in Slovenia;

<sup>1</sup> Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 22 March 2023 and adopted by the Congress on 22 March 2023, 2nd sitting (see Document [CPL\(2023\)44-02](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: David ERAY, Switzerland (R, EPP/CCE).

d. the three recognised communities, Italian, Hungarian and Roma,<sup>2</sup> benefited from special voting rights at local level, which is an important feature of a truly democratic and inclusive environment;

e. turnout in the first round remained quite significant despite several elections taking place in 2022, which could have led to more voters' fatigue.

5. At the same time, the Congress notes with concern the following issues:

a. on the Election Day, some regulations and procedures varied greatly depending on the municipality and led to:

i. ballot boxes not being sealed in a unified manner, which did not ensure full security of the process;

ii. voters having difficulties identifying the right ballot boxes and oftentimes unfolding their ballots before throwing them in the boxes – which could have compromised the secrecy of the vote to a certain extent;

iii. variations in the number of registered voters per polling station between a few hundreds to nearly 3 000, which increased waiting times and exposed electoral staff to unnecessary stress;

b. close to a quarter of the mayoral races were held without competition and nearly all incumbent mayors were re-elected, underlining the strong power of incumbency which can lead to an accumulation of power, incusted structures, lack of transparency, increased risks of misuse of administrative resources and difficulties for challengers to run in mayoral races. This situation was not fully conducive to democratic change and may hamper the involvement of women and youth in local politics;

c. only 13.7% of mayors and 34.5% of municipal councillors are women and progress on the participation of women at local level is very slow;

d. the existing low expenditure ceiling for campaigns can lead candidates to turn to creative ways for the collection of donations, which is particularly relevant in a country like Slovenia, which is known for a high number of non-partisan candidates and independent lists;

e. some minorities are not considered autochthonous and are not given specific voting or representation rights at local level in Slovenia, in particular, the German-speaking community and citizens from former Yugoslavia, and the Roma community continues to be underrepresented in local politics.

6. In light of the above, the Congress invites the authorities of Slovenia in particular, to:

a. entrust the State Election Commission with some coordinating and overseeing powers, notably regarding unified procedures in the whole country for polling station set-up, the sealing, numbering and identification of ballot boxes and setting a maximum number of registered voters per polling station;

b. consider introducing regulations to set a maximum number of mandates for mayors and to balance the benefit of incumbency in order to ensure a levelled playing field for all candidates, including youth and women, and increase competitiveness of the elections;

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "*Gens du voyage*", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

c. introduce provisions to support the participation of women in mayoral races to support equal representation at local level;

d. strengthen the regulatory framework ensuring transparency and accountability of campaign and party finances;

e. consider granting more political rights at local level for representatives of other minorities in Slovenia, and take more steps to prevent hate speech during campaigns, in particular targeted towards the Roma community, in line with Resolution CM/ResCMN(2022)9 on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by Slovenia.

7. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and other relevant institutions of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation regarding the 2022 local elections in Slovenia and of the explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.



## Cantonal elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2 October 2022)

Recommendation 491 (2023)<sup>1</sup>

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities refers to:

a. Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Committee of Ministers' Statutory Resolution CM/Res (2020)1 on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;

b. Chapter XIX of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress on the practical organisation of election observation missions;

c. The principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) which was ratified by Bosnia and Herzegovina on 12 July 2002;

d. Congress Recommendation 432 (2019) on the elections of the Cantonal Assemblies in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (7 October 2018) and its explanatory memorandum;

e. The invitation by the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina, dated 6 July 2022, to observe general elections held in the country on 2 October 2022.

2. The Congress reiterates the fact that genuinely democratic local and regional elections are part of a process to establish and maintain democratic governance and that observation of grassroots elections is a key element in the Congress' role as guardian of democracy at local and regional level.

3. The Congress acknowledges that, overall, the legal framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina is conducive to holding democratic elections, with the exception of dispositions in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Congress notes that recent amendments by the High Representative addressed some issues related to the integrity of the electoral process, despite being adopted shortly before the elections and on the Election Day which is contrary to the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters.

4. The Congress notes with satisfaction that:

a. the Election Day was overall conducted in an orderly fashion;

b. in order to reduce the possibility of electoral fraud, numerous practical improvements to the voting process were satisfactorily implemented in most polling stations such as the introduction of stamping of ballot papers and of a special procedure for assisted voting, revision of polling station set up to avoid voters taking photos of their ballots and/or family voting, and the ban of the practice to read a voter's name aloud;

<sup>1</sup> Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions on 22 March 2023 and adopted by the Congress on 22 March 2023, 2nd sitting (see Document [CPR\(2023\)44-02](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Stewart DICKSON, United-Kingdom (R, ILDG).

c. electoral amendments introduced by the High Representative ahead of the elections increased the oversight and investigation powers of the Central Election Commission and, by clearly defining hate speech, contributed to a slightly less aggressive campaign environment;

d. polling station commissioners, to a large extent, were well informed of the Election Day procedures and received sufficient training;

e. an electronic application tool was developed for processing registration of out-of-country voters to prevent multiple registrations at the same address and the Central Voters Register was progressively cleaned of deceased voters.

5. At the same time, the Congress notes with concern the following issues:

a. the concurring organisation of State, entity and cantonal elections posed considerable challenges to the election administration and contributed to excessively focusing the campaign upon national politics which is detrimental to local democracy;

b. the challenges in the appointment of polling station commissioners by political parties and the long-standing politicisation of the election administration, as well as the alleged practice of trading of seats, in particular at polling station level;

c. the campaign being marked by some instances of hate speech, an overall marginalisation of youth and women and the widespread polarised discourse by political parties focusing almost exclusively on ethnic matters and not offering voters programmes addressing cantonal issues;

d. the worrying situation of the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the lack of transparency regarding ownership and political affiliations of local and national outlets, which led to limited and biased coverage of the campaign;

e. the alleged abuse of administrative resources by incumbents, insufficient reporting on cases of electoral corruption and lack of transparency and oversight over campaign and party finance;

f. the compromised secrecy of the vote, in particular in smaller polling stations, due to inadequate positioning of polling screens and set-up of polling booths and challenges related to the unfolding of ballot papers in front of ballot boxes;

g. the continuous challenges impacting voters' universal right to vote, in particular due to:

i. the lack of accessibility of polling stations and/or the font used on some ballot papers, which were not adapted to the needs of voters with disabilities or visual impairments and the elderly;

ii. the lack of awareness of polling station commissioners on the new requirements for assisted voting, which, in some instances, led to voters being refused the right to vote with assistance or others being assisted without proof of impairment;

h. the absence, in legislation and practice, of a "genuine" residence criterion for voters living *de facto* abroad who are allowed to vote in cantonal elections, which is not in line with Congress Resolution 369(2015).

6. In light of the above, the Congress invites the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to:

a. strongly reconsider holding cantonal elections at the same time as national ones and rather to organise cantonal alongside municipal elections, to avoid cantonal elections being overshadowed by national polls and to contribute to the strengthening of local democracy;

*b.* revise the conditions of appointment and dismissal of polling stations commissioners in order to avoid trading of seats and contribute to the professionalisation and de-politicisation of the election administration;

*c.* establish effective sanctions and reduce timeframes for cases of hate speech, online and offline, and strengthen provisions to increase participation of youth and women in cantonal politics, through the implementation of an alternating placement system and stronger regulations regarding seat allocation;

*d.* fully implement existing media legislation including oversight and enforcement powers of bodies responsible for media monitoring. Consider revising Chapter 16 of the Election Law in particular, to ensure equal access of all political subjects to the media. Undertake measures to promote programme-based campaigns and to protect freedom of the media and journalists from political pressure;

*e.* further strengthen existing legislation on electoral corruption and misuse of public resources in order to guarantee a level playing field for all candidates and ensure that effective and more dissuasive sanctions are imposed;

*f.* address issues pertaining to the breach of the secrecy of the vote, in particular by improving inadequate polling station set-up in small polling stations and through reconsidering the placement of polling screens which do not ensure the secrecy of the vote;

*g.* improve accessibility of polling stations for all voters, in particular voters with disabilities and visual impairments, and carefully review and inform voters of the procedure of assisted voting;

*h.* complete efforts to render the Central Voters Register more accurate and address the issue of citizens residing *de facto* abroad and voting in cantonal elections.

7. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and other relevant institutions of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation regarding the 2022 cantonal elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina and of the explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.





**44th SESSION****Embedding democracy at grassroots level:  
the future of the Council of Europe and the role of the Congress  
therein****Congress contribution to the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Heads of State and Government  
of the Council of Europe on 16-17 May 2023 in Reykjavik, Iceland**

Recommendation 492 (2023)<sup>1</sup>

**The Congress, one of the two political assemblies within the Council of Europe**

1. Since the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Vienna in 1993, where the creation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities was decided, the member States have increasingly recognised the fundamental role of the institutions of local democracy in preserving stability in Europe.
2. It is undeniable that greater unity both between States and within the States themselves starts at the level of cities, municipalities and regions. Local and regional authorities play an important role in making European democracy more stable and more resilient and have proven their capacity to relay and implement national policies while duly fulfilling their responsibilities in tackling everyday challenges and crisis situations as clearly highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.
3. Today, in the Council of Europe, the Congress represents, through its members, 130,000 local and regional authorities from 46 member States. This network of elected representatives delivers the local dimension of the Organisation's work in the fields of human rights, the rule of law and democracy, thus constituting a crucial asset for the Organisation and firmly rooting the intergovernmental work carried out by the Council of Europe in the life of local and regional communities.
4. A greater involvement of local and regional authorities and the Congress in monitoring democratic progress, ensuring respect for human rights at the local level and defending the rule of law, would bring Europe and its values closer to the citizens.
5. The increasing role of local and regional governments in embedding democratic values at the grassroots, delivering on policies and recommendations of the national governments and the European Organisations has to go hand in hand with a stronger recognition of the Congress' key contribution to the political mission of the Council of Europe, as the conduit transmitting the work and values of the Organisation to the level closest to the citizen.

<sup>1</sup> Debated and adopted by the Congress on 22 March 2023, 2nd sitting (see Document [CG\(2023\)44-10](#)), co-rapporteurs: Bernd VÖHRINGER, Germany (L, EPP/CCE) and Harald SONDEREGGER, Austria (R, EPP/CCE).

6. In order to successfully address common challenges and deliver solutions and support for all European citizens, local and regional authorities, and the Congress as their representative assembly at the European level, need recognition from national governments of the reality of decentralised governance in the member States and a strong, renewed commitment to grassroots democracy. This commitment should be reflected in a stronger political position for the Congress in the institutional architecture of the Council of Europe.

7. The Congress, together with the Parliamentary Assembly, as the two political assemblies of elected representatives within the Council of Europe, should play a greater role in fulfilling the Council of Europe's mandate and acting as multipliers of the Organisation's standards and values at all levels of governance.

### **A historic duty: supporting Ukraine**

8. Since Thursday 24 February 2022, Ukraine has been subjected to a full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation. This war is a tragedy for Ukraine and its people who have shown strength and courage in their resistance. This war is also a tragedy for Europe.

9. European and international solidarity has supported Ukraine in many ways, by welcoming refugees, by supporting the country financially or by providing defence and fighting capacities.

10. In this large mobilisation, the Ukrainian local and regional authorities have helped the country stand steadily and face the consequences of the war.

11. The Congress has unfailingly expressed its commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and it will continue to extend its unwavering support to Ukraine and its people.

12. In its areas of competence, the Congress has strengthened, and will continue to strengthen the local and regional authorities' resilience in the face of this aggression and its aftermath. In addition to condemning Russia's aggression and every action taken since then that undermines democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the Congress is mobilising its networks of cities, regions, institutions, and associations to support the creation and coordination of partnerships, humanitarian aid, exchange of know-how and technical co-operation between Ukrainian local and regional authorities and their counterparts in Europe. Under the Congress patronage, the matching platform "Cities4Cities/United for Ukraine" was established and continues to create long term partnerships between Ukrainian and other European cities and regions in delivering aid and support.

13. Since 2011 and now, within the new Council of Europe Action Plan "Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction", the Congress is implementing activities to strengthen and consolidate local democracy in the country and to promote multi-level governance, open government and a human-rights based approach at local level. It will also work to ensure the return to the respect of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government after the end of the martial law.

14. These areas of cooperation are being identified together with the Ukrainian delegation to the Congress, the Ukrainian national authorities and the Ukrainian associations of local and regional authorities.

## **Securing a continent with strong democracies and more inclusive, sustainable and cohesive societies**

15. The war in Ukraine has added to the unprecedented challenges that have undermined democratic security and trust over the past years.

16. Democratic societies are facing internal threats expressed in the increasing polarisation, socio-economic inequalities, the rise of populism, extremism, disinformation and hate speech. They are confronted also with external threats related to the impact of the war in Ukraine, migratory movements, pandemic threats, climate change, the energy transition and its consequences, which have also contributed to undermining citizens' trust in democratic institutions.

17. Some of these challenges are not new but the recurrence and gravity of the crises democratic societies are facing makes it ever more important to reassert unity and solidarity in Europe and to reflect on how to reinforce democracy, rule of law and human rights protection on the continent.

18. Challenges and crises affect all levels of governance. Central and local governments must act together, in synergy to respond to them in an efficient and sustainable way.

19. Adopting a bottom-up approach to defining strategies and policies at the highest level and engaging local governments, communities, and their leaders as partners can cement the political commitments of States, anchor the fundamental values of the Organisation, secure democratic stability, develop resilient, inclusive, and peaceful societies and thus prevent the atrocity of war.

20. The Congress stands ready to actively contribute to the implementation of the results of the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government within its realm of competences, in complementarity with the Parliamentary Assembly and the intergovernmental sector, for the future of the continent and its citizens.

21. Within the Council of Europe, it can further provide tools and obtain results in enhanced quality of local democracy, increased participation and engagement of citizens and youth with its statutory activities based on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, with its cooperation activities and its thematic contributions.

22. In the light of the above, the Congress wishes to make the following recommendations to the 4th Summit of the Council of Europe member States set out below.

### ***23. With regard to the Congress as one of the two political assemblies at the Council of Europe, the Congress recommends that the Heads of State and Government:***

*a.* confirm and support the essential role of local and regional authorities in advancing and fulfilling the States' commitments to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law;

*b.* promote the political impact and work of the Congress in the institutional framework of the Council of Europe as the body representing the voices of 130,000 local and regional authorities;

*c.* recognise the role of local and regional authorities in delivering democracy, human rights and the rule of law in their communities, and thereby the role of the Congress – one of the two political assemblies of the Council of Europe – as the conduit transmitting the Organisation's values and work to the level closest to the citizen;

*d.* strengthen the Congress' coordination with the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly as well as its contribution to the three pillars of the Organisation by:

- i. inviting the Congress to participate in the joint committee coordinating the action between the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly;
- ii. consulting the Congress:
  - on the admission / withdrawal of member States since it could inform on the state of local democracy in the State in question;
  - before the adoption of draft conventions and protocols in order to make sure they are in line with the principles of local democracy;
- e. mainstream all activities of the Organisation involving municipalities, cities and regions and their national associations under the umbrella of the Congress in order to ensure the coherence and efficiency of the Council of Europe activities on local democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

**24. *With regard to the historic duty of supporting Ukraine, the Congress recommends that the Heads of State and Government:***

- a. promote the ongoing and future work of the Congress in supporting Ukrainian local and regional authorities and their associations as well as their engagement with counterparts in other European countries, including in support of Ukrainian refugees;
- b. support the Congress to further strengthen the capacities, competencies and resilience of local and regional authorities and their national associations, facilitate peer exchanges with their counterparts in Europe, contribute to their EU integration efforts and, when the time comes, to pursue Ukraine's local self-government reform;
- c. involve the Congress as well as local governments in the recovery and reconstruction efforts of Ukraine;
- d. support the "Cities4Cities/United for Ukraine" platform in further establishing a Europe-wide partnership programme between Ukrainian and other European cities.

**25. *With regard to securing a continent with strong democracies, the Congress recommends that the Heads of State and Government:***

- a. reaffirm their commitment to regular and comprehensive monitoring of the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the treaty setting out the principles of local democracy and ensure increased and more comprehensive co-operation between all Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms;
- b. acknowledge the role of the Congress recommendations as an "early warning system" for the Council of Europe on the state of local and regional democracy in Europe, to reverse the worrying trends of democratic backsliding;
- c. express their commitment to apply international electoral standards in local and regional elections and to facilitate their observation;
- d. automatically invite the Congress to observe local and regional elections;
- e. commit to more active participation by States in post-monitoring and post-electoral political dialogue and, when needed, to further cooperation activities with some countries;
- f. confirm the role of the Congress, together with local and regional authorities which hold a significant share of public power, in putting human rights at the core of their work and by setting up human rights institutions at local level;

*g.* uphold the importance of the Congress' activities on human rights, in cooperation with national authorities, in particular when assessing and improving the implementation of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights related to local and regional authorities;

*h.* allocate the necessary means to the Congress to ensure its capacity to deliver regularly on the monitoring of the Charter and the observation of elections, two statutory duties assigned to the Congress by the member States, and to strengthen its activities on human rights and the rule of law.

**26. *With regard to more inclusive, sustainable and cohesive societies, the Congress recommends that the Heads of State and Government:***

*a.* decide to further promote ways to enhance citizen participation and to build inclusive communities, at local and regional levels as a cross-cutting feature of Council of Europe activities and call upon the States to adhere to the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority;

*b.* support the Congress in its continuing efforts to involve young people in decision making by helping local authorities improve their youth work policy and practice;

*c.* secure the future funding of the successful "Rejuvenating Politics Initiative" which gives the opportunity to 46 young people each year to take an active part in the Congress sessions and committees' work;

*d.* give priority to concerted action to be undertaken at all levels of government in order to respond to environmental challenges and tackle the climate crisis while recognising the essential role of local and regional authorities in this respect;

*e.* proactively involve local and regional authorities when designing preventive and curative public policies to manage climate and environmental crises since all major crises will eventually impact all levels of governance;

*f.* support the Congress' work in promoting the role of local and regional authorities in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Congress areas of competence;

*g.* recognise the role of local and regional authorities as key partners of national governments in addressing the challenge of migratory flows and, accordingly, involve them in the development and implementation of migration, reception and integration policies;

*h.* ensure that local and regional authorities are enabled to effectively deliver migration, reception and integration policies, while upholding social cohesion, by resettling migrants and refugees across European and national territories in a balanced manner, including between urban and rural areas;

*i.* support local and regional authorities in their action to protect the human rights of migrants and refugees in vulnerable situations, including by preventing and combating human trafficking or exploitation for labour or sexual purposes.



## Localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Recommendation 493 (2023)<sup>1</sup>

1. In 2023, the United Nations will hold its annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2023 and the SDG Summit in September 2023 in New York. The latter will mark the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
2. As two-thirds of the SDG targets can only be implemented at local or regional level, localisation of SDGs is an urgent priority. The SDG Summit must give a new momentum to this process.
3. In this respect, as an assembly of local and regional authorities with a leading role for localisation of SDGs, the Congress is convinced that:
  - a. multi-level governance is key to achieving the SDGs; it is a shared responsibility of all levels of government and requires constant dialogue and consultation with all local actors, such as municipalities and regions, their national associations, the private sector and civil society; and
  - b. citizens must always remain at the heart of the action.
4. Considering the abovementioned, the Congress calls on national governments to:
  - a. accelerate the process of localisation of SDGs and give local and regional authorities proper autonomy for action and decision making, which includes proper competencies and the financial and budgetary autonomy required to achieve the goals in their respective areas;
  - b. involve local and regional authorities in the design, development and implementation of National SDG Action Plans;
  - c. encourage local and regional authorities and their national associations to conduct Voluntary Local Reviews and/or Voluntary Sub-national Reviews; Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) should build on such reporting processes;
  - d. encourage sharing and learning across levels of government, as well as emphasizing experimentation and innovation to find better solutions to common challenges;
  - e. pursue a coherent approach to SDG implementation and limit negative effects, by identifying critical interdependencies between action areas;
  - f. amplify the political voices of local and regional authorities to raise awareness about the SDGs, enabling their participation in relevant international forums, such as the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, HLPF and the SDG Summit;
  - g. increase involvement of youth in decision making and all the activities that lead to the achievement of SDGs; and

<sup>1</sup> Debated and adopted by the Congress on 22 March 2023, 2nd sitting (see Document [CG\(2023\)44-13](#)), co-rapporteurs: Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC/G/PD) and Gunn Marit HELGESEN, Norway (R, EPP/CCE).

*h.* build stronger partnerships with all local actors, including civil society and the private sector, in order to implement the Agenda 2030.

5. The Congress is ready to continue its involvement in the work of the Council of Europe, its member States, its Committee of Ministers and its other institutional actors, by sharing its knowledge of local and regional authorities and the tools at its disposal and promoting implementation of SDGs.



## **APPENDIX 1**

### **The Congress contribution to UN High-Level Political Forum and SDG Summit (July and September 2023)**

#### **Introduction**

1. The United Nations Agenda 2030 lists 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action to all countries to end poverty, improve health and education, reduce inequalities, take action to combat climate change, encourage economic growth, and ultimately improve the well-being of the citizens and the communities they live in.
2. The United Nations will hold its annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2023 and the SDG Summit in September 2023 in New York. The latter will mark the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
3. The HLPF is the central United Nations platform that meets annually under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council for eight days, including a three-day ministerial segment and every four years at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the General Assembly for two days. HLPF includes presentation of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), an assessment made by individual countries to show progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda.
4. The sets of SDGs to be reviewed in-depth in 2023 are Goals 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).
5. To review the implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Europe, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) will hold its annual Regional Forum in March 2023. The outcomes of the UNECE Regional Forum will contribute to the HLPF on Sustainable Development in July and the SDG Summit in September 2023.

#### **The Council of Europe and the Agenda 2030**

6. The Council of Europe contributes to the implementation of the Agenda 2030 through a human rights-based approach based on its pan-European dimension, institutions, normative framework and capacity for action.
7. Most of the Council of Europe's activities are relevant and are aligned with relevant SDGs, thus directly contributing to the implementation of Agenda 2030. While recognising that the main responsibility for the implementation of Agenda 2030 lies with member States, the Council of Europe's role as an international organisation is to assist and facilitate member States in their contribution to SDG implementation.

#### **The Congress and SDGs**

8. Since two-thirds of the SDG targets can only be implemented at local or regional level, the Congress promotes localisation of SDGs together with local and regional authorities and their associations.
9. Through its statutory and cooperation activities, the Congress's work addresses 12 of the 17 objectives defined in the United Nations Agenda 2030. The Congress regularly contributes to the HLPF and SDG Summit.
10. To successfully implement the SDGs, the Congress cooperates with a wide range of actors both internal and external to the Council of Europe. In 2019, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted a resolution calling for greater synergies between the two institutions in the implementation of the SDGs.
11. Outside of the Council of Europe, the Congress cooperates with a variety of international organisations representing local and regional authorities, such as the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and 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), the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), and others.

12. Over the past two decades the Congress has developed its activities in different areas that directly relate to the achievement of SDGs, such as the promotion of human rights, the fight against discrimination, gender equality, local and regional governance, public ethics, citizen participation, migration management and social inclusion.<sup>2</sup>

13. The Congress views the concept of sustainability in a broad sense of the democratic, social, and economic sustainability based on three key principles: achieving SDGs is the shared responsibility of all levels of government, local and regional authorities must have proper competences and financial autonomy to achieve the Goals and citizens must always remain at the heart of the action.

### **SDG implementation: a shared responsibility**

14. Achieving the SDGs is a shared responsibility of all levels of government: global, European, national, local, and regional.

15. SDG implementation is a shared responsibility which requires mobilisation of municipalities and regions, civil society, businesses and other local stakeholders. As such, the Congress strongly advocates for multi-level governance and an active role for local and regional authorities in the implementation of SDGs.

16. Multi-level governance systems increase the quality of decisions, generate lasting solutions and allow greater resilience in the face of crises.

17. Insights from local and regional authorities allow better sustainability in policies to be developed. It is the conviction of the Congress that it is impossible to implement a policy nationally if its implementation fails locally. National governments must establish a constant dialogue with regional and local authorities on implementing SDGs, through effective consultation mechanisms to ensure proper implementation of the SDGs.

### **Empowering territorial authorities**

18. Local and regional authorities must also be empowered to act. They must have the necessary freedom to make decisions and take action, which means that they must have their own powers, budgetary autonomy and the freedom to decide on how to use local resources. It is only then that local and regional authorities will be able to adapt strategies and embed them in a dynamic local context.

19. Local and regional authorities need the competencies, skills and tools to implement and monitor the SDGs, adapted to their local context and their needs. National associations of local and regional authorities can help develop these tools and foster learning and experience sharing at the local level. For example, in Germany and Italy, national associations set up portals with city-level indicators to measure SDG implementation. Such tools help local governments understand where they stand, and what more can be done.

20. Mayors and councillors are the level of governance closest to the citizens and enjoy the highest level of trust within the current national political landscapes. They also represent the most direct point of contact between governments and citizens. They are the intermediaries that can help bring European values and national policies closer to the people and ensure that people in their communities understand and participate in the implementation of SDGs.

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<sup>2</sup> Congress Thematic Activities: Contributing to the UN Agenda 2030 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/sdg>

## **Putting citizens at the heart of the implementation of Agenda 2030**

21. Citizens must be at the heart of the implementation of Agenda 2030. Local and regional authorities bear the primary responsibility for addressing citizens' needs as the authorities closest to them. Citizens must therefore be engaged in local decision making on the issues of community development. They must be co-owners of the decisions on integrated territorial planning and the use of resources of their communities.

22. Citizens look to their local authorities for guidance, support, opportunities and ultimately protection. Towns are a tier of government that is the closest to citizens, and mayors and councillors are on the frontlines dealing with societal challenges, driven by multiple recent crises – war in Ukraine, COVID-19, migrant crisis, natural disasters, inflation, social crisis. Cities and regions have been playing a central role in the crisis management and experience shows that involving local authorities leads to building resilient governance systems, that lead to inclusive and peaceful societies.

### **Multi-level involvement in VNRs for better coordination and ownership**

23. All levels of government responsible for putting national policy into practice must be involved in VNRs. National authorities must integrate findings from local and regional authorities to fully benefit from the knowledge and innovation at the local level.

24. There is a growing realisation on the part of local authorities that SDG strategy development and implementation should come bottom-up. Over 2020 and 2021, the total number of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) available worldwide has more than tripled with the biggest progress by far registered in the European region, where there is a long tradition of local self-governance (*Towards the Localization of SDGs, 2022, UCLG*).

25. VLRs ensure ownership of the Agenda 2030 by local authorities and can be a useful tool, because they reflect the realities on the ground, show what is working in the local communities and the progress toward target indicators, share best practices and allow the mayors to develop public policy.

26. Evidence shows that VLRs and localisation of SDGs leads to “better vision of localization processes, more attention from national governments and sometimes even better coordination with the involvement of local government associations in national mechanisms. Such reporting processes also strengthen the dialogue between local governments and international institutions” (*Towards the Localization of SDGs, 2022, UCLG*).

### **Amplifying territorial voices**

27. The Congress must defend and amplify local and regional voices, make local initiatives for the SDGs visible in different international forums, such as the HLPF, the SDG Summit, and CoE Summit for Heads of State, and strongly advocate for the empowerment of local and regional authorities. With the authority to act, the skills to implement and the voice to share their experience, local and regional authorities can be powerful actors in building a sustainable future.

### **Youth involvement is key**

28. All levels of government must increase their efforts to involve youth in decision making and all the activities that lead to the achievement of SDGs. Youth is very active and politically involved when it comes to environmental and inequality issues and their views must be integrated in the design and implementation of public policies. At local, regional, and national levels, structures for youth participation such as youth councils, youth parliaments, and youth forums should be encouraged. Such structures can serve as an effective platform for consultation with young people's associations and organisations. Young people's involvement is key to having a healthy democratic society and achievement of the SDGs.

### **Localisation of SDG – the Congress' pledge**

29. There is an urgent need to accelerate localisation of SDGs and the Congress is ready to continue its involvement in the work of the Council of Europe, its member States, its Committee of Ministers and its other institutional actors, by sharing its knowledge of local and regional authorities and the tools at its disposal and to help implement SDGs.

44th SESSION

## Monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Romania

Recommendation 494 (2023)<sup>1</sup>

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe refers to:

*a.* Article 2, paragraph 1.b, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, stipulating that one of the aims of the Congress is “to submit proposals to the Committee of Ministers in order to promote local and regional democracy”;

*b.* Article 1, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1 relating to the Congress, stipulating that “The Congress shall prepare on a regular basis country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all member States and in States which have applied to join the Council of Europe, and shall ensure the effective implementation of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government”;

*c.* Chapter XVIII of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress on the organisation of monitoring procedures;

*d.* the Congress priorities set up for 2021-2026, in particular priority 6b that concerns the quality of representative democracy and citizen participation;

*e.* the sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goals 11 on sustainable cities and communities and 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions;

*f.* the guidelines for civil participation in political decision making, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 September 2017;

*g.* Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of citizens in local public life, adopted on 21 March 2018;

*h.* Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on supervision of local authorities’ activities, adopted on 4 April 2019;

*i.* the previous Congress Recommendation on the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Romania [Recommendation 300 (2011)];

*j.* the explanatory memorandum on the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Romania. [CG (20)09].

<sup>1</sup>. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 23 March 2023, 3rd sitting (see Document [CG\(2022\)44-11](#), explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Marc COOLS, Belgium (L, ILDG) and David ERAY, Switzerland (R, EPP/CCE).

2. The Congress points out that:

a. Romania joined the Council of Europe on 7 October 1993, signed the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122, hereinafter “the Charter”) on 4 October 1994 and ratified it on 28 January 1998. Romania has not signed the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of local authorities (CETS No. 207).

b. Romania has made a reservation concerning Article 7 paragraph 2 and an interpretative declaration regarding Article 4 paragraph 4 and 5 of the Charter.

c. The Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by member States of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (hereinafter referred to as Monitoring Committee) decided to examine the situation of local and regional democracy in Romania in the light of the Charter. It instructed Marc COOLS, Belgium (L, ILDG) and David ERAY, Switzerland (R, EPP/CCE), with the task of preparing and submitting to the Congress a report on the implementation of the Charter in Romania. The delegation was assisted by Prof. Tania GROPPPI, member of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and the Congress Secretariat.

d. The monitoring visit took place from 12 to 13 October 2022. The Congress delegation met the representatives of various institutions at all levels of government. The detailed programme of the monitoring visit is appended to the explanatory memorandum.

e. The co-rapporteurs wish to thank the Permanent Representation of Romania to the Council of Europe and all those who they had exchanges with during these meetings.

3. The Congress notes with satisfaction:

a. the progress made by Romania since Recommendation 300 (2011), especially on the consultation of the local authorities, even if there is still room for some improvements;

b. the substantial weight of the local authorities’ sector on the public expenditures;

c. the reform on metropolitan areas and the proposals to strengthen cooperation between rural communes;

d. the role of the Court of Accounts in enhancing the efficiency and transparency of the local sector;

e. the de facto respect of Article 7, paragraph 2, of the Charter on the financial compensation of elected local representatives.

4. The Congress draws the attention of national authorities to the following issues:

a. the weakness and fragmentation of the communes, in rural areas, undermining their capacity to carry out their competences;

b. the necessity to improve and facilitate voluntary mergers or intermunicipal cooperation;

c. the transfer of powers concerning local public services is not always accompanied by financial resources commensurate with their responsibilities;

d. the lack of transparency in the allocation of financial resources between the central and local levels of government which does not allow the real needs of local authorities to be addressed;

e. the limited use of their financial autonomy by local authorities, which depend mostly on State or European funds;

f. the limited possibility for local authorities to finance investments;

g. the necessity to strengthen the regional level;

*h.* the lack of a special autonomy for Bucharest, in the light of Recommendation 452 (2021) of the Congress on the Status of Capital Cities;

*i.* the sometimes too short deadlines within which associations are consulted by the government;

*j.* Romania has not signed nor ratified the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

5. In light of the foregoing, the Congress requests that the Committee of Ministers invite the authorities of Romania to:

*a.* improve and facilitate voluntary mergers or intermunicipal cooperation;

*b.* allocate to the local authorities financial resources commensurate with their responsibilities, as stated in Article 9 paragraph 2 of the Charter, thus enabling them fully to exercise their functions and to improve their possibility to finance investments;

*c.* improve existing measures to prevent all forms of political interference at local level and ensure transparent, equitable distribution of resources between the central and local levels;

*d.* continue the reforms on regional development in order to involve the regions in territorial administration;

*e.* establish a special autonomy for Bucharest, in the light of Recommendation 452 (2021) of the Congress on the Status of Capital Cities, in order to provide substantial procedural safeguards to guarantee the capital city's autonomy and minimise the risk of interference from other levels of government;

*f.* comply with the deadlines set up in the legal framework in order to ensure a consultation in due time;

*g.* consider lifting its reservation to Article 7 paragraph 2 made at the time of the ratification of the Charter since the regulation concerning this matter seems *de facto* to be in compliance with this provision of the Charter;

*h.* sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

6. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation on the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Romania and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.





**44th SESSION****Verification of new members' credentials**

Resolution 491 (2023)<sup>1</sup>

The Congress,

1. in accordance with the provisions of Article 7 of the Congress Charter and Rule 6 of the Congress Rules and Procedures;
2. noting that 494 of the 612 members proposed by the authorities of the member States have already signed the Code of Conduct for Congress members and submitted the Declaration of Interests in accordance with the provisions of Rule 6 of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress;
3. noting that 34 seats are still vacant;
4. taking into account the opinion of the Bureau and of the rapporteurs responsible for the verification of the credentials of new members which concluded that the 46 proposed national delegations comply with the criteria of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;
5. approves the credentials of members of national delegations as set out in Document CG(2023)44-04 subject to the signature of the Code of Conduct and submission of the Declaration of Interests of Congress members listed therein;
6. invites those members who have not yet done so to proceed without delay to sign the Code of Conduct and the Declaration of Interests of Congress members in accordance with the provisions of Rule 6 of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress;
7. invites the authorities of the member States concerned to fill the vacant seats in accordance with the applicable provisions, as soon as possible.

<sup>1</sup> Debated and adopted by the Congress on 21 March 2023, 1<sup>st</sup> sitting (see Document [CG\(2023\)44-02](#)), co-rapporteurs: Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC/G/PD) and Aleksandra MALETIC, Serbia (R,EPP/CCE).