



THE CONGRESS OF  
LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES  
**COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

# COMMUNICATION

of the Secretary General  
of the Congress

at the 1140th meeting of the  
Ministers' Deputies (9 May 2012)  
on Congress activities since November 2011  
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**Communication by the Secretary General of the  
Congress at the 1140<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ministers'  
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Andreas Kiefer, Secretary General of the Congress



## Introduction

Two years after having started its in-depth reform, the Congress is well on its way to reinforcing itself as an operational and result-oriented assembly. It is engaged in a close dialogue with the Committee of Ministers and with national authorities on its key priorities, in order to build synergies between national and grassroots action in the areas of common concern.

This complementarity of action was also the emphasis of the Chaves report, which was approved by the Ministerial Conference in Kyiv, and its proposal for an agenda in common, which the Congress has promoted over the past months.

The Congress has carried out targeted grassroots co-operation activities that consolidate its new orientation and complement national action. The work in favour of Roma inclusion and citizens' participation, the fight against child abuse and domestic violence, the analysis of the impact of the financial crisis on local and regional authorities in Europe, and the promotion of practical solutions are some concrete examples of this new orientation. The assistance to Mediterranean countries, such as Morocco and Tunisia, is part of the Congress' contribution to the Council of Europe's neighbourhood policy, and also represents a practical example of the Congress' spirit of co-operation and complementarity.

For the Congress, these activities are closely linked to its core mission of monitoring the situation of local and regional democracy in member states. Monitoring provides opportunities for stronger dialogue with national authorities to address existing problems and to identify common challenges, innovative action and new solutions which could be taken on board under an agenda in common, that the Congress wishes to be implemented as soon as possible.

On the basis of the new rules of procedure and the Charter of the Congress, a new four years term of membership will begin in October 2012. Member States will be invited soon by the Secretary General to nominate the new delegations.



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# **Implementing the priorities**

## **1. The political dialogue with the member States**

- **President Whitmore addresses the Committee of Ministers**  
(Strasbourg, 16 November 2011)

During the annual exchange of views with the Committee of Ministers, Keith Whitmore recalled the major reform steps of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in 2010-2011. In addition to the central mission of monitoring local and regional democracy, the President referred to recent Congress events such as the Summit of Mayors on Roma and to other important fields of Congress action, for example, promoting human rights at the local level, pursuing local integration for better social cohesion and increasing citizens' participation through the European Local Democracy Week.

- **Follow-up to the Kyiv conference** (3-4 November 2011)

The 17th session of the Conference of Ministers responsible for local and regional authorities approved the report of Manuel Chaves, Spanish Minister for Territorial Policy and Public Administration, on the work of the Council of Europe in the field of local and regional democracy. This report takes into account the reforms initiated by the Congress since the Utrecht Conference notably on transparency and the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Mr Chaves proposes that Congress sets an Agenda in common together with the ministerial conference to improve coordination and cooperation among members of Congress and those who decide on local and regional policies in governments. The Parliamentary Assembly and the NGOs should also be fully associated. Five specific topics are being proposed: monitoring the impact of the economic crisis on local and regional government and policy responses at central, regional and local level; strengthening the democratic participation of citizens; developing the concept of multi-level governance in the Council of Europe; promoting human rights and awareness raising among local and regional authorities and multi-level cooperation to overcome the obstacles in transfrontier cooperation.

- **High-Level Meeting on Local and Regional Democracy**  
(London, 13 February 2012)

At the invitation of the United Kingdom Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, the Congress participated in this high-level meeting, which brought together representatives of Permanent Representations from Council of Europe member states, and other Council of Europe stakeholders in the field of local and regional governance. Congress President Keith Whitmore headed the Congress delegation and the meeting was chaired by Baroness Hanham, Parliamentary under Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The Congress President presented a "position paper" in which he reiterated the willingness of the Congress to maintain and strengthen political dialogue with its institutional partners, including the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly. He also recalled how effectively the process of preparing the Chaves report was conducted, with the consultation of all relevant bodies and the adoption, unanimously, of this report at the Kyiv Ministerial Conference. The adoption of the report was a milestone in strengthening cooperation between all political actors of the Council of Europe working on issues of local and regional democracy. The Congress urged all parties to immediately implement the agenda in common as suggested in the Chaves report.

The Congress document also stressed the importance of the Council of Europe reform which aims to improve the ongoing work of the Organisation. This work has to include the development of synergies between the various partners involved, but requires also, according to the Congress, the preservation of the administrative and financial autonomy of the organs of local and regional democracy of the Council of Europe. He drew attention to the risks

involved in a merger of the secretariats, budgets and work programs. Following the meeting, a new paper was prepared by the United Kingdom Chairmanship.

## **2. Co-operation within the Council of Europe**

In the spirit of the Council of Europe reform, the Congress embarked on close co-operation with the operational Directorate Generals of the Organisation (DG programme, DG Human Rights and Rule of Law and DG Democracy). This transversal work for the preparation and implementation of action plans and co-operation activities ensures better impact through using the full potential of the Organisation.

The Congress also asked for voluntary contributions for the implementation of some of these concrete activities.

- **Action Plans**

The Congress has included projects on local and regional democracy in the Council of Europe action plans for Ukraine, Armenia, and Kazakhstan and in the context of neighbourhood cooperation with Morocco and Tunisia (see para.15 b).

- **Intercultural Cities**

As part of its cooperation with the "Intercultural Cities" programme launched by the Council of Europe and the European Union, the Congress held a round table discussion during the 22nd Session on 21 March, on "Intercultural City: building an inclusive local identity". The Director of the Democratic Governance, Culture, and Diversity Directorate moderated the debate.

- **Inclusion of Roma**

The Congress' work in favour of Roma inclusion has been conducted since September 2011 in close cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Roma issues (see para.10).

- **European Committee for Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR)**

On 2 and 3 April 2012 in Strasbourg President Whitmore, Lars Molin, the Chair of the Monitoring Committee and the Congress Secretary General met the Bureau of the CDLR. They discussed the follow-up to monitoring missions and identified key and pressing issues for which there is a real need for further work on both sides, such as local responses to the financial crisis and citizens' participation in the democratic process.

The Congress President had an exchange of views with the CDLR on the priorities and current work of the Congress. He made it clear that the Congress is ready to start work on the agenda in common as identified by Minister Chaves.

In these exchanges it was underlined that the communication and exchange between Congress members and CDLR members is a process for the benefit of all. President Whitmore encouraged Congress delegations to make contact with their country representatives in the CDLR on a regular basis, to ensure the exchange of information and for them to be fully aware of their countries' stance on certain issues relating to local and regional democracy as recommended in the Kiviniemi report.

- **Steering Committee on Human Rights (CDDH)**

The Secretary General of the Congress addressed the CDDH during its plenary meeting on 9 December 2011. He explained how the Congress had intensified its action regarding human rights, and recalled its intention to make use of its existing networks and knowledge bases to mobilise its resources to bring human rights issues to the attention of local authorities in

member States. Two recommendations and resolutions were adopted in 2010 and 2011 for this purpose. In 2011, several exchanges of views took place with different Committee of Ministers Rapporteur groups.

The Secretary General stressed the importance of developing a closer working relationship with the CDDH in order to improve the work of the Congress through the expertise of this steering Committee, and to establish links in member states on local governance. Andreas Kiefer also stressed that contacts with the Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union are ongoing in order to build upon their expertise in analytical indicators, surveys, and questionnaires. The aim is to provide local authorities with the necessary methodology and conceptual arsenal to approach the subject.

- **Parliamentary Assembly**

The Congress President held a bi-lateral meeting in Strasbourg with the newly-elected President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Jean-Claude Mignon, on the day of the election 24 January 2012. The two Presidents discussed areas of common interest such as the fight against sexual exploitation of children and committed themselves to working together much more closely in the future. New synergies between the Congress and the Parliamentary Assembly will also be ensured through co-ordinated action between Rapporteurs of both institutions in key areas. Keith Whitmore – who invited the PACE President to address the Congress Session in October – underlined the importance of close co-operation between the national and the territorial levels.

President Whitmore also met with the newly-elected presidents of three PACE committees (Strasbourg, 23 and 25 January 2012). With the Chairman of the Monitoring Committee, Andres Herkel, he addressed the monitoring of member states and the observation of elections, with the Chair of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, Maury Pasquier, he spoke of issues related to local and regional democracy and sustainable development and with Pietro Marcenaro, President of the political Affairs Committee, he discussed the situation in Kosovo, Roma issues and the "Arab Spring".

### **3. Monitoring local and regional democracy**

#### **a) The monitoring activities**

In the framework of the 2010 reform, the activities relating to the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government have been stepped up. It will be more frequent and more regular, since each member state will now be visited and evaluated every five years, these activities involve more political dialogue with the states concerned.

#### **Visits carried out**

Since November 2011, the Congress carried out three local and regional monitoring visits. The visits to Moldova and Bosnia-Herzegovina led to recommendations that were adopted during the 22nd session (see below). The report on the visit to "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" will be on the agenda of next session.

- **The visit to "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (5 -7 December 2011)**

Congress Rapporteurs, Ian Micallef (Malta, EPP/CD) and Andrée Buchmann (France, SOC), examined the honouring of commitments entered into by this country in the light of the country's ratification of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in June 1997. The delegation focused on the country's response to the recommendations to the national authorities following the last monitoring visit in 2007. Meetings were notably held with Nevzat Bejta, Minister of Local Self-Government; Koce Trajanovski, Mayor of Skopje; Fatmir Izairi, Mayor of Zhelino and Zoran Zaev, Mayor of Strumica.

## Adopted recommendations

During the 22<sup>nd</sup> Session, the Congress adopted six recommendations on local and regional democracy in the following countries:

- **Lithuania** (21 March 2012)

The second monitoring report on the situation of local and regional democracy in Lithuania, presented by Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, SOC) and Irene Loizidou (Cyprus, EPP/CD), praises, in particular, the guarantees given in the constitution to the right to self-government for local authorities and progress made in consultation procedures between associations of local government and the central level. Congress's Recommendation 321 (2012) suggested that Lithuanian authorities allocate sufficient resources to local authorities, entrench the principle of subsidiarity in the law on self-government and encourage citizens to participate in local affairs.

During the debate held by the Chamber of Local Authorities, special attention was given to the situation concerning the participation of national minorities in political local life in Lithuania and access to education in the languages of the Russian and Polish minority population in the country. Comments on this situation were appended to the report and it was agreed that the Monitoring Committee of the Congress would look closely into the issue of national minorities participation in local political life in member States of the Council of Europe, during their next meeting planned in October 2012.

- **Czech Republic** (21 March 2012)

The report was presented by the rapporteurs, Emil Calota (Romania, SOC) and Philippe Receveur (Switzerland, EPP/CD), who expressed satisfaction that the legislative framework was in line with the Charter. They noted, however, that the fragmentation of municipalities still posed a challenge to effective and efficient local self-government and that coordination and simplification of the overall system of controls carried out by the State administration seemed necessary. In Recommendation 319 (2012) the Congress recommended that the Czech Government develop the mechanisms of consultation with local and regional authorities and encouraged the government to uphold the principle of concomitant financing and invited them to ratify those provisions of Articles 4 and 9 of the Charter which they had not ratified, since these are de facto operational now.

- **Germany** (21 March 2012)

The monitoring report, presented by Britt-Marie Lövgren (Sweden, ILDG), states that Germany has implemented the recommendations made by the Congress after its monitoring of the local government finances in 1999. In Recommendation 320 (2012), the Congress acknowledged the very high standards of local democracy both in the constitutions of the federation and the Länder as well as in everyday life. It nonetheless invited German authorities to work out the standards for concomitant financing of local authorities, to strengthen and institutionalise participatory rights of national associations of local authorities both at federal and Länder level and to 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.

- **Republic of Moldova** (22 March 2012)

The report, presented by Francis Lec (SOC, France), was produced following two monitoring visits in September and November 2011. Recommendation 322 (2012) states that the national decentralisation strategy developed by the government of the Republic of Moldova is a sign of this country's commitment to conducting a thorough reform of local public administration. While calling on the Moldovan authorities to ensure that local authorities were allocated resources commensurate with their responsibilities and to adopt a new law on the status of the capital, Chisinau, the Congress believed that the efforts of the Republic of

Moldova should be encouraged, so that the good intentions expressed by the authorities are translated into future action.

The visit of 23-25 November was the second stage in the monitoring process, which was launched by a first visit in early September 2011. The Congress rapporteurs, Francis Lec (SOC, France) and Ignacio Sanchez-Amor (SOC, Spain) met with Dorin Chirtoaca, Mayor of Chisinau and a member of the Moldovan delegation to the Congress. They discussed the state of local democracy in the Republic of Moldova and examined, in particular, the capital's new statute, which is currently before the Moldovan parliament. They also discussed the distribution of competences between the capital and central government, notably with regard to budget allocation.

- **Portugal** (22 March 2012)

The report presented by Jos Wielen (Netherlands, EPP) and Devrim Çukur (Turkey, SOC) highlighted the difficulties that local and regional authorities have been facing since 2008. The Portuguese Government has reduced their competencies and resources because of financial constraints, leading to a net decline in some basic principles of local autonomy in Portugal. Recommendation 323 (2012) calls on the Portuguese authorities to give local authorities more autonomy with respect to local taxes and to ensure effective participation by municipalities in the legislative process to reform the 2007 Local Finance Act.

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina** (22 March 2012)

The report presented by Beat Hirs (Switzerland, ILDG) and Jean-Marie Belliard (France, EPP/CD), who visited the country in April and December 2011, welcomed the passing on 3 February 2012, of the Law on the Population Census and urged the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to carry out this census as soon as possible. The country's complex structure, the fact that there has been no population census since 1991 and the lack of clarity in the definition of responsibilities are still hampering the development of local self-government. Recommendation 324 (2012) calls on the entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to draw up reform plans on devolution and implement in practice the principles set out in the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The Congress stresses notably the need to continue the current discussions on revising the constitution of the Republika Srpska in order to grant special status to the city of Banja Luka and to assign it appropriate powers and resources.

The visit of 12-13 December 2011 was the second stage in the monitoring process, which was launched by a first visit in April 2011. The Congress rapporteurs, Jean-Marie Belliard (France, EPP/CD) and Beat Hirs (Switzerland, ILDG) held meetings notably with Zoran Mikulic, Minister of Justice of the F BiH; with Sarajevo and Herzegovina-Neretva cantonal authorities, and with Vinko Radovanovic, Mayor of East Sarajevo.

## **b) Observation of local and regional elections**

As part of its reform, the Congress has widened the scope of its observation activities by assessing the entire electoral process and is focussing now, more than in the past, on the concrete follow-up to recommendations resulting from election observation missions.

Furthermore, emphasis is placed on regular training sessions for members of Congress election observation delegations. This training is usually carried out in co-operation with the Congress' strategic partners in the field of election observation, notably with the Committee of the Regions, but also with national associations of local self-government. A recent example of successful collaboration in this field was the training session carried out on 13 February 2012 in London, organised in partnership with the UK Local Government Association. The role of international observers, the political mandate of the Congress and mutual benefits for local elected representatives were at the centre of this presentation.

On 19 March 2012, the Congress has received an invitation to observe local elections in Serbia, which will be held on 6 May 2012. Consequently, a pre-election delegation will visit Belgrade from 17 to 19 April and the actual observation by a delegation from the Congress taking place from 2 to 7 May 2012.

## **Institutional activities**

### **4. Meetings of the Bureau**

- **Strasbourg, 2 December 2011**

The Bureau reviewed the latest draft of the new Rules of Procedure of the Congress and was invited to send contributions and comments to the Rapporteurs before the next meeting.

Members considered the report of the Ukrainian Chairmanship and the priorities of the UK Chairmanship and heard President Whitmore's report on his presentation to the Committee of Ministers at the handover (7 November) and his exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies (16 November). The Bureau was also given information about the written communication from the Secretary General of the Congress, made available to the Ministers' Deputies on 16 November and it welcomed the fact that this document would be circulated to all Congress members in the five working languages.

The Bureau heard a report from the Secretary General on the proposed Congress contribution to Council of Europe activities in Armenia, Morocco, Tunisia and Ukraine and the follow-up to capacity building and cooperation between local elected officials in Albania. It was also informed that following the Summit of Mayors on Roma, a working group comprising representatives of 12 European cities would meet on 9 December to work on the creation of an Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion (network of cooperation and exchange of good practice). It also heard the conclusions of the meeting of the Contact Group Congress/Committee of the Regions (CoR) in Brussels on 29 November and the work of the CIVEX committee, especially concerning the future evolution of the CoR's involvement in election observation missions. A document on this subject will be finalised by the CoR Bureau.

The Congress President informed the Bureau of replies he had received to the letters he wrote concerning the imprisonment of a Congress member, Leyla Güven. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) and the Venice Commission would consider this issue according to their respective agendas. The Secretary General stated that the case of Leyla Güven would be considered by the 6th High Criminal Court of Diyarbakir (Turkey) at its hearing on 6 December 2011.

- **Paris, 20 January 2012**

The Bureau was informed about the official journeys of the President and the Secretary General, including the meeting of the Secretary Generals of the CoR, the Congress and the European Associations of Local and Regional Authorities in Brussels on 17 January, as well as the meeting with representatives of Ministers responsible for European affairs from sixteen German Länder in Berlin on 19 January.

Members were also informed of the communication from the Delegation of the United Kingdom before the Ministers' Deputies (18 January 2012) concerning the high-level meeting on local and regional democracy to be held in London on 13 February 2012, under the UK Chairmanship of the Council of Europe.

The preparation of the 22nd Session, the co-operation activities, the preparatory work of the Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma inclusion and the activities of the Committees and the Chambers of the Congress were among the other items on the agenda.

The Secretary General informed the Bureau about the latest developments concerning the situation of Leyla Güven who was still imprisoned in Diyarbakir.

- **Strasbourg, 17 February 2012**

The members were briefed on the high-level meeting on local and regional democracy held in London on 13 February and in particular on the recognition of the respective specificities of the CDLR and the Congress. Following this meeting, the British Chairmanship would prepare a new document, to be submitted to the Bureau.

Members also discussed a request from the European Committee for Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) for a meeting with the Bureau of the Congress and agreed in principle to hold a meeting of the Bureau and the Statutory Forum in Tirana in June 2012 as part of the future Albanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. The preparation of the 22nd Session, the report on local election observation in Bulgaria, co-operation activities in Albania, Morocco, Tunisia and Ukraine, and the activities of the committees and Chambers of the Congress were examined.

The Secretary General informed members about the latest developments concerning the situation of Leyla Güven and drew their attention to the list of 131 local and regional politicians detained in Turkey as of 31 January 2012, which had been sent by the Mayor of the metropolitan municipality of Diyarbakir, also President of the Union of Municipalities of South East Anatolia of Turkey.

- **Strasbourg, 19 and 22 March 2012**

The Bureau was informed about the implementation of the 2011-2012 Congress priorities and appointed the Chairs of the Governance and Monitoring Committees as rapporteurs on preparing the priorities for the period October 2012 to October 2016. These priorities would be submitted for adoption at the October 2012 session.

The Bureau took note of the creation of a new political group in the Congress, the "Group of European Conservatives and Reformists". It also took note of an analysis of the mandates of intergovernmental committees at the Council of Europe and identified six that are of particular interest to the Congress.

Furthermore, the Bureau exchanged views with Urszula Gacek, Chair of the Committee of Ministers' Group of Rapporteurs on Democracy (GR-DEM). Improved co-operation with the Committee of Ministers and a more dynamic dialogue with the intergovernmental sector of the Council of Europe were at the centre of this exchange. Ambassador Gacek acknowledged the Congress's contribution to Council of Europe core activities and to priority issues such as work on Roma inclusion. Ms Gacek encouraged the Congress to build on its unique experience in local democracy at a pan-European level and to adopt measures to increase knowledge and raise awareness of this work. Congress Bureau members welcomed the exchange of views and confirmed their readiness to pursue this partnership approach, also by developing a strategy for a more coherent follow-up of Congress reports and recommendations at the level of the Committee of Ministers and in Council of Europe member states.

The Secretary General informed the Bureau of a letter from Leyla Güven received on 21 March 2012 concerning the detention of elected officials from the Party for Peace and Democracy in Turkey, including her own detention, and that her hearing was scheduled for 9 April 2012. It was agreed that the Secretariat would continue to inform the Bureau of new developments concerning Leyla Güven at each of its meetings.

## 5. Plenary sessions

- **22<sup>nd</sup> Session** (Strasbourg, 20-22 March 2012)

President Whitmore opened the session with a statement on the activities of the Congress since the October 2011 session. He mentioned in particular the reform of the Congress, and the Chaves Report, which advocates closer cooperation between the Congress and the Conference of Ministers responsible for local and regional authorities. Speaking about the challenges ahead, Mr. Whitmore mentioned the targeted post-monitoring and post-election observation co-operation in the member states, the follow-up of the Summit of Mayors on Roma and the joint activities with the countries of the southern Mediterranean.

During the session the Congress held debates on current issues faced by locally elected representatives, especially the financial crisis and its implications for local and regional authorities, the draft European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma inclusion and intermediate levels of government and good governance. It held several round tables and adopted several reports during the Chambers meetings (see below).

In his address to the session, Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government of the United Kingdom, encouraged the Congress to implement now and in their entirety, the Chaves report and the recommendations of the Kyiv Ministerial Conference of November 2011. "This will pave the way for governments and the Congress working together in areas where such cooperation is relevant in the context of an agenda in common," he said. During his speech, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe highlighted the essential role of the Congress to provide concrete answers to the problems Europe is facing, particularly with regard to intercultural issues and the promotion of cultural diversity. In addition, he praised the work of the Congress regarding the inclusion of Roma, as well as its contributions to the Kyiv Conference. The Deputy Minister of the Interior of Albania, Ferdinand Poni, also spoke at this session.

The session also adopted recommendations on the monitoring of local and regional democracy in six countries (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Germany, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova and Portugal) and a recommendation on the observation of elections in Bulgaria.

Moreover, the Congress adopted its new Rules of Procedure, which had been revised in the light of the reform.

## 6. The Statutory Forum

Composed of the Heads of national delegations and the members of the Congress Bureau, the Forum was set up as part of the recent reform of Congress, replacing the Standing Committee. It addresses the strategic aspects of the activities of the Congress.

The Statutory Forum met on 20 March 2012, on the occasion of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Session. The main item on the agenda was the follow-up activities to the Committee of Ministers' proposals concerning local and regional government, resulting from the Conference of Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government including the role of the Head of National Delegations.

In this context, President Whitmore reminded the heads of delegation of their important role in developing and maintaining contacts with other political actors in their member States, namely parliamentarians, pertinent ministers and members of the CDLR as well as permanent Representatives in Strasbourg.

In the framework of the UK Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, Baroness Hanham, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government, took part in an exchange of views with the members of the Forum. She

presented the new discussion paper that the British Chairmanship has prepared following the high-level meeting in London. The Bureau of the Congress will review this document and report back its observations and comments to the UK Chairmanship.

## **7. The Chamber of Local Authorities**

During the 22<sup>nd</sup> Session, the Chamber held a roundtable on "Intercultural City: Building an inclusive local identity", as part of its co-operation with the Intercultural Cities programme launched by the Council of Europe and the European Union. The mayors of six European cities (Dublin, Rotterdam, Geneva, Osmangazi/ Bursa, Limassol and Izhevsk) reported on their experience in developing local policies in this area and discussed ways of shaping an optimum model for dealing with cultural diversity in local communities and managing relations between different ethnic and cultural groups.

The Chamber also adopted a report on "Making Cities Resilient," encouraging cities to join the United Nations campaign on this theme, and recommending concrete action in a series of areas including knowledge development and sharing, funding mechanisms, addressing different types of cities, and an integrated and multi-level governance approach to resilience building.

Finally the Chamber adopted a report on Local Democracy in Lithuania (see para. 3 a).

## **8. The Chamber of Regions**

During the 22<sup>nd</sup> Session, the Chamber held a round table on "Recent developments in regionalisation." The Congress wished to tackle the issue of the impact on regionalisation of the austerity measures and limits on public expenditure as consequence of the financial crisis. The Congress' members supported the principles set out in the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy on the necessary balance between resources and competencies and the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity. This round table, and the last one held in October 2011, provided information on the state of regionalisation in some ten European countries. To deepen the knowledge of the latest developments of regionalisation in relation to the Reference Framework, the Chamber has invited the Governance Committee to prepare a report on this issue.

The Chamber also held a round table on "Regional governance in Europe: efficiency, transparency, and control". The capacity of European regions to meet their responsibilities and competencies is directly dependent on the quality of the management of financial resources at their disposal. Regional officials have discussed ways to improve efficiency and transparency of their actions and to reconcile, in their internal functioning, effective governance and the rule of law. The round table emphasised that accounting practices should be standardised in order to increase transparency, ensure freedom of information and enable citizens to hold responsible authorities accountable. Because of the Internet the world is opening-up up and citizens are demanding more information, which can improve the transparency and reliability of public accounting. Therefore, reports of public accounts should be more accessible. The need to increase the independence of public auditors, but also their personal liability (in case of financial loss suffered by the community) was also highlighted.

The Chamber exchanged views on transfrontier co-operation with a presentation of the Euro Region "Yaroslavna", created on the border between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The Euro Region, composed of the Kursk Oblast and the Sumy Oblast, is a good example of transfrontier cooperation as it has helped strengthen ties between the two oblasts, not only between different governmental levels, but also between the peoples of the region –and led to joint programs in the fields of education, youth, culture and environment.

## **9. The Committees**

### **a) The Monitoring Committee**

The Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by member states of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, was set up in October 2010 as part of the reform of the Congress structures. Its Chair is Lars O. Molin (L, EPP/CD, Sweden). Its three Vice-Chairs are Gudrun Mosler -Törnström (R, SOC, Austria), Francis Lec (L, SOC, France) and Alexander Uss (R, EPP/CD, Russian Federation).

The Committee is responsible for monitoring the application of the Charter as well as institutional developments in Europe's regions, for preparing reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in the countries that have ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government and for monitoring specific questions related to local and regional democracy in member States.

The Committee held its meeting on 26 February 2012 in Stockholm (Sweden) during which it approved six draft recommendations on local and regional democracy in Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, Czech Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Moldova.

This meeting also resulted in an exchange of views with Annelise Oeschger, President of the Human Rights Commission of the Conference of INGOs, on the follow-up that should be given to the recommendations and resolutions of the Congress concerning the implementation of human rights at local level. It was mainly a question of how to integrate civil society in the process of promotion and awareness of local and regional authorities to human rights. Following this discussion, the Committee decided to create a think tank bringing together members and experts, to examine how a concrete follow-up could be given to the recommendations adopted by the Congress in regard to human rights by closely associating civil society.

The Monitoring Committee has also responded to various requests that had been sent to it from the Congress Bureau and the Bureau of the Chamber of Local Authorities on the situation of local and regional democracy in Belgium, Finland, Hungary and Ukraine.

The Committee's programme of activities including the planning of 11 monitoring visits for 2012 and 2013 respectively and the composition of monitoring delegations was approved. The monitoring visits for 2012 would take place in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Denmark, Georgia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy (second part), Spain, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

### **b) The Governance Committee**

The Governance Committee was set up in October 2010 as part of the reform of the Congress structures. Its Chair is Karl-Heinz Lambertz (R, SOC, Belgium). The three vice-chairs are Britt-Marie Lövgren (L, ILDG, Sweden), Enes Özkıarslı (R, EPP, Turkey) and Irmeli Henttonen (L, ILDG, Finland).

The Committee is responsible for affairs falling within the scope of the Congress' statutory mandate such as governance, public finance, cross-border and interregional co-operation and e-democracy as well as co-operation with the European Committee of Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR).

At its meeting on 20 March 2012, the Governance Committee was informed by the Chair, Mr Karl-Heinz Lambertz, on the follow-up to the Ministerial Conference which had been held in Kyiv (3-4 November 2011) and the High-Level meeting, organised by the UK Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, which had taken place in London (13 February 2012)

The Committee discussed the draft programme for its seminar on transfrontier co-operation, which will be held in Innsbruck on 30 May 2012.

A debate was held on 'Second level local authorities – intermediate governance in Europe'. Several member states are proposing to cut second level local authorities as part of the central government response to the economic crisis. The Committee is concerned that some of these reforms are being introduced too hastily and that it is necessary to examine the added value that such authorities bring in a multi-level governance context.

Another debate was held on 'The changes underway in the Arab countries'. The Committee agreed that the Congress should focus on sharing experience rather than presenting European practices as models to be copied. It stressed the need to develop links with civil society in the countries concerned and to network with other organisations such as COPPEM and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM). Concern was expressed that the rights of women were at risk of being eroded in the wake of some of the revolutions.

The Committee reviewed the progress of the reports that it is preparing on consultation of local authorities, criteria for standing for local elections and macro regions. Rapporteurs were assigned for future reports, including the adequate financing of local and regional authorities and inter-regional cooperation.

### **c) The Current Affairs Committee**

The Current Affairs Committee was set up in October 2010 as part of the reform of the Congress structures. Its Chair is Emin Yeritsyan (EPP/CD, L, Armenia). Its three Vice-Presidents are: Barbara Toce (SOC, L, Italy), Farid Mukhametshin (ILDG, R, Russian Federation) and Claudette Abela Baldacchino (SOC, R, Malta).

Under its terms of reference, the Committee is responsible for studying the role of local and regional authorities with regard to the major challenges of our society; preparing work on thematic issues such as social cohesion, sustainable development, education, culture and intercultural dialogue from the point of view of the Council of Europe's core values; and proposing action to respond to existing or emerging problems as well as to emergencies at local and regional levels.

The Committee met in Strasbourg on 8 February 2012. The members discussed the Committee's priorities and future activities, particularly in the context of the preparation of several thematic reports on the impact of the economic crisis on local and regional authorities, the changes taking place in Arab countries and the political disengagement of young people. They also discussed a report on making cities resilient in the face of natural disasters, which is to be presented at the March 2012 session of the Congress, and discussed follow-up to the Summit of Mayors for Roma. Another report is currently being drafted on the subject of preventing sexual exploitation of children and a special seminar is organised on the day after the meeting, ie. 9 February 2012, as the Congress' contribution to the Council of Europe's ONE in FIVE campaign.

At its meeting of 20 March 2012, during the 22nd Session of Congress, the Committee considered reports and approved the draft resolutions and recommendations on the changes taking place in Arab countries - an opportunity for local and regional democracy, on developments on the political involvement of youth in democracy, as well as legislation and regional action to combat the sexual exploitation of children. The Committee also nominated the rapporteurs for future reports, including the impact of the economic crisis on local and regional authorities, the situation of young Roma, migrants' access to regional labour market, as well as promotion of local entrepreneurship of migrants.

## **At grassroots level**

### **10. Roma inclusion**

- **The European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion**

Since the Summit of Mayors on Roma in September 2011, the Congress has been working in close co-operation with the Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General on Roma related issues to establish a co-operation framework for cities and regions willing to promote Roma inclusion. A Core Group of such cities and regions was set up in the wake of the Summit and has so far held two meetings, on 9 December 2011 and 22 February 2012, which have allowed drawing the contours of a future "European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion."

The exact mandate of this Alliance has now to be defined and funding for its operations and to start its activities is to be secured. Its activities should respond to the concrete needs of the involved communities. A questionnaire was thus sent out in March this year to a large number of cities and regions in order to help identify their needs and priority issues. Based on this, the Congress and its partners will be able to develop the future work of the Alliance.

A project presentation to the European Commission is scheduled in April in order to associate the Commission as closely as possible to this project. In addition, a debate was held at the 22nd session with the participation of the "Open Society Foundation," which is ready to support the work of the Alliance. The launch itself will take place in September 2012.

### **11. Support of the democratic process in the Euro-Mediterranean region**

- **Contribution to the "Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Equality between Women and Men in Local Life (Istanbul (Turkey), 18 November 2011)**

Suica Dubravka, Vice-President of the Congress, took part in the Standing Committee for the Euro Mediterranean Partnership of Local and Regional Authorities (COPPEM) Preparatory Meeting. She welcomed the COPPEM initiative to draw up this Charter, which should be a stepping-stone on the path towards ensuring that women's participation in society remains constant, on a par with men, is based on equality, and begins at the grassroots. She underlined that is a timely proposal, given the momentous historical changes in North Africa.

- **The Congress and COPPEM share common missions in the Euro-Mediterranean region (Palermo, Italy), 17 - 18 December 2011)**

President Whitmore addressed the XVI General Assembly of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership of Local and Regional Authorities (COPPEM). According to him, the Congress and COPPEM share strong common interests in developing Euro-Mediterranean co-operation and are able to develop practical synergies. He underlined that the transformations underway in North Africa and across the Arab world, have led to new neighbourhood policies that are being implemented by both the European Union and the Council of Europe. The Congress is firmly committed to pursuing and strengthening the dialogue for cooperation and democratic development between European and Arab municipalities, in particular with COPPEM members from the countries of the southern Mediterranean.

## 12. Rewarding good practices

- **Best Practice Award for Coastal Towns**

A new initiative to reward best local practices for the regeneration of coastal towns was launched on 11 January 2012 in Strasbourg. European local communities were invited to take part in this competition, by sending the completed “expression of Interest” form. The competition is organised by the Council of Europe Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform, in the framework of the UK Chairmanship and in partnership with the Congress and the UK Local Government Association. The Prize will be awarded in May 2012.

## 13. Citizen participation: European Local Democracy Week

- **Promoting inclusive communities at grassroots level through human rights activities** (Paris, 26 January 2012)

Representatives from municipalities, national associations, and European networks assessed the results of the 2011 edition of the ELDW and agreed on action in the field of citizen participation in 2012. The new ELDW edition will continue promoting “human rights” at grassroots level in order to foster and strengthen, in particular, social cohesion in local communities. Keith Whitmore stated that the overall aim of the ELDW is to develop local democracy by achieving a real culture of human rights at the grassroots.

- **Certificate for “Twelve stars cities” 2011**

The Congress presented a “12 Star City” certificate to 19 municipalities that had played a particularly active role in the ELDW 2011 through involving their citizens in a wide range of events, at a ceremony organised with the City of Strasbourg during the 22<sup>nd</sup> session.

## 14. Contributing to Council of Europe campaigns

### a) Fighting sexual exploitation of children: the ONE in FIVE campaign

- **Meeting of the Network of Contact Parliamentarians** (Florence (Italy), 17 November 2011)

Dusica Davidovic, Congress Thematic Rapporteur on Children, took part in the 5th Meeting of the Network of Contact Parliamentarians to fight sexual violence against children. She stated that the Congress has drawn up a strategic Action Plan to promote the local and regional dimension of the Council of Europe’s ONE in FIVE Campaign, in order to raise awareness and to encourage the establishment of child-friendly services at grassroots level.

- **Conference on the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child** (Monaco, 20 November 2011)

Taking part in this conference, President Whitmore said that the Congress has contributed actively to the Council of Europe programmes for children’s right and protection, such as its new Strategic Actions Plan which covers the local and regional dimension of the ONE in FIVE Campaign and will continue in the battle to rid Europe of violence of all sorts against children.

- **Seminar to combat sexual exploitation of children at local and regional level** (Strasbourg (France), 9 February 2012)

As part of its contribution to the ONE in FIVE campaign, the Congress organised this seminar, which gathered a panel of experts, grassroots players and local and regional elected representatives. Based on the experiences presented, the Congress drew attention to examples of structures that could be set up at local and regional level to prevent the sexual exploitation of children and to protect and support victims and their families.

## **b) Combating violence against women**

- **Conference on combating domestic violence** (Bratislava (Slovakia), 29 November 2011)

Taking part in this Conference, Congress Rapporteur Sandra Barnes said that local and regional authorities should lobby their governments to sign and ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. She thought that they have a pivotal role to play by leading by example, promoting good practices, monitoring and evaluating the programmes that will be enacted to eradicate the problems.

## **15. Co-operation activities and partnership**

### **a) External partnerships**

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

In 2011-2012, the Congress has intensified its co-operation with the Committee of the Regions.

The Congress and the CoR held several meetings, in particular the Contact Group meeting of 29 November 2011 in Brussels. Co-operation was carried out in several areas such as multi-level governance, counteracting corruption at local and regional level, local election observation, neighbourhood policies, the protection of fundamental rights and municipal policies in favour of Roma.

On 29 November 2011, the Contact Group organised a meeting of experts\* on corruption issues in Brussels. The objective of the meeting was to analyse good practices that could be of concrete benefit to local and regional administrations and to be promoted by the Congress and the CoR. The Congress also gathered information on texts and initiatives already existing (or underway) within other international organisations, with a view to avoiding duplications and create synergies with them.

The election observation missions allowed the Congress and the CoR to assess the electoral aspect of local democracy on the ground. The Congress encouraged the CoR to present the Congress' observation reports to the Bureau or CIVEX Commission of the CoR and to invite the Congress rapporteurs for these presentations. As for the future, the Congress will bring the co-operation a step closer by inviting a CoR member to join its pre-electoral missions.

In December 2011, President Whitmore addressed the Bureau of the Committee of the Regions in Brussels focusing his presentation on the main results of the cooperation and its perspectives for the future.

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\* Experts representing the Council of Europe Agreement of States against corruption (GRECO), the European Commission, the European Anti-fraud Office (OLAF), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and Transparency International.

On the 26th January 2012 during their annual bipartite meeting, Mr Whitmore, President of the Congress and Mrs Mercedes Bresso, President of the Committee of the Regions of the EU, analysed the state of the implementation of the co-operation agreement Congress/CoR and defined their joint political priorities for 2012 (*i.e.* local and regional elections observations, multi-level governance, neighbourhood policies, good governance and the fight against corruption at local and regional level).

The Congress also attended a round table on the equality of women and men organised by the CoR in Brussels on 8 February 2012.

On 22 March 2012, at the end of the plenary session, the Congress organised a meeting of its members who are also members of the Conference of Local and Regional Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP). The meeting was organised with a view to creating synergies with the European Union to the benefit of local and regional authorities of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. These countries are already members of the Council of Europe and major actors in the EU Eastern Partnership initiative. During the meeting, the Directorate General of Programmes of the CoE presented the action plans and initiatives for Ukraine and Armenia. The Congress believes that it is possible to evolve to a practical phase of the Congress-CoR cooperation. CORLEAP can represent an opportunity for both institutions to use past experience and launch new ideas, new initiatives, and new actions in synergy.

In line with the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union, the Congress and the CoR keep strengthening their co-operation. For the future, they can reciprocally benefit from the complementarity of their respective fields of activity while ensuring to avoid duplications.

- **Networks**

- **The Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA)**

- The Congress continued to monitor very closely the evolution of ALDA and is regularly represented at its major meetings and in its decision-making bodies.

- During the 22nd session, ALDA organised for members of the Congress on behalf of the Conference of INGOs, a meeting to present the Code of practice for civil participation in decision-making. The meeting aimed at gathering examples of good practice in citizen and civil participation and identify activities to promote and use the code locally.

- **The Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe (NALAS)**

- This network, created at the initiative of the Congress in 2001, continues to be a privileged partner of the Congress in its field activities in Southeast Europe.

- Addressing the NALAS General Assembly Meeting, in Pristina on 30 March 2012, Ludmila Sfirloaga, Vice-President of the Congress considered the main theme of fiscal decentralisation as one of major importance in the current context of economic downturn and ongoing financial crisis. She underlined the role of local authorities in responding to this challenge and in particular the need for a greater involvement of women in local political life in the South East of Europe. Mrs Sfirloaga also emphasised the importance of NALAS' contribution and the spirit of cooperation NALAS maintains in the region, with its partners, and in particular with the Congress.

- **European Associations of Local and Regional Authorities**

- The Congress has continued to pay great attention to co-operation with the associations representing regions in Europe.

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

The Congress took part in the General Assembly in L'Aquila (Italy) on 24 November 2011.

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

The Congress attended the General Assemblies held in Ponta Delgada (Portugal) on 24 and 25 November 2011 and in Brussels on 26 March 2012.

**Conference of European Regions with Legislative Powers (REGLEG):**

The Congress participated in the General Assembly held in Brussels on 29 and 30 November 2011. President Whitmore addressing the XII annual conference of REGLEG on 30 November, underlined the many objectives shared by REGLEG and the Congress, in particular a joint project for 2012 to hold an International Conference on "the Role of Regions with Legislative Powers within the European Union and the Council of Europe". This is a concrete achievement of the cooperation agreement signed by the Congress with REGLEG in October 2011.

**b) Targeted co-operation and partnership**

One of Congress' priorities for 2011–2012 is targeted post-monitoring and election observation co-operation. To achieve concrete results with respect to the recommendations of its monitoring and election observation missions, the Congress may organise specific cooperation programmes with the member States concerned to address major issues that it recommends need improving and to increase the knowhow and capacity of local governance and election organisation.

Such programmes should involve local and regional representatives, not just those of the countries concerned but also those from other European countries who are willing to share their knowledge and expertise on a peer-to-peer basis.

The Congress is thus engaging in a new action to support European local and regional elected representatives in the improvement of their capacities and leadership.

In the framework of the Council of Europe neighbourhood policy, the Congress is also enlarging its action to neighbouring non-member States.

- **Action Plan for Ukraine**

With this in mind, the Congress joined the Council of Europe action plan for Ukraine by adding to its local democracy component. These actions are intended to be complementary with those of the Centre of Expertise on the local administration reform and should support the European reform agenda of Ukraine in the field of local and regional democracy.

- **A unified platform for local and regional elected representatives of Albania**

At the seminar in Tirana in September 2011 on "capacity building and cooperation of local officials in Albania," Albanian mayors agreed to engage in the restoration of dialogue and cooperation and proposed to create a working group for this purpose. The Congress held consultations on 14-15 December 2011 with the Albanian authorities; members of the Albanian Parliament; mayors; local government associations and the international community to explore ways to implement the conclusions of the seminar.

In this context, President Whitmore spoke on 18 January 2012 in Tirana at the opening of the General Assembly of the Association of Albanian Municipalities. He recalled that the Congress is ready to support the development of dialogue between local and regional elected representatives, through concrete measures to implement a unified platform for dialogue

based on political pluralism. During his meeting with the President of the Congress on 17 January 2012, Albanian Prime Minister, Sali Berisha, reiterated the willingness of the Albanian authorities to give priority to decentralisation and development of local and regional democracy in his country.

Moreover, the Congress and the Centre of Expertise have developed a joint project 2012-2015 to strengthen good local and regional governance in Albania, which was submitted to the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation for funding.

- **Neighbourhood co-operation with Morocco**

On 14-15 February 2012, a delegation from the Council of Europe led by the Director General of Programmes, including the Director of the Congress, went to Rabat. The purpose of the mission was to bring together different elements to set priorities and determine the conditions for the establishment of programmes to be implemented within the framework of cooperation between the Council of Europe and Morocco. The Congress Director met amongst others the Presidents of both Houses of Parliament, various members involved in the project of regionalisation and the Mayor of Rabat.

The Congress intends to cooperate with Morocco based on peer-to peer exercises and the application of the principles enshrined in the founding texts of Congress such as the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, the European Code of Conduct on the political integrity of local and regional representatives. It proposes assistance to legislative activities, including the preparation of an organic law on regionalisation, assistance in various stages of the electoral process, the granting of a 'special status' to representatives of local and regional elected officials in the Congress and the participation of some Moroccan cities in the European Week of Local Democracy.

- **Neighbourhood co-operation with Tunisia**

On 5 and 6 March 2012, President Whitmore participated in a joint delegation of COPPEM (Standing Committee of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership of Local and Regional authorities), the ATO (Arab Towns Organisation) and the Congress for a visit to Tunis. The delegation met amongst others with the Minister of Regional Development and Planning; the Mayor of Tunis; senior representatives of the Ministry of Interior; the President and members of local and regional authorities within the National Constituent Assembly; the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Mayor of Bizerte.

This visit identified two main needs of Tunisia: emergency financial assistance for infrastructure and institutional support to establish the necessary conditions for the development of genuine democracy. The Action Plan of the Council of Europe will contribute at this level. The Congress could intervene in contributing to the work of the National Constituent Assembly in the field of local and regional democracy, offering a 'special status' in the Congress to local and regional representatives of Tunisia, by sharing its expertise with the future Parliament on electoral processes and developing cooperation with the National Association and the newly elected representatives.





## **The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe**

### **The voice of Cities and Regions in Europe**

- The Congress is a political assembly composed of 636 elected officials - mayors, governors, councillors, etc. – representing the 200 000 local and regional authorities of the 47 Council of Europe member states.

*It speaks for Europe's local and regional elected representatives.*

- The Congress promotes devolution through transfer of political powers and financial resources to the municipalities and regions.

*It ensures that policy decisions are made at a level closest to the citizens.*

- The Congress guarantees civic participation and fosters a positive perception of local identities.

*It strives for living grassroots democracy in an ever more globalised world.*

- The Congress reinforces local and regional democracy by permanently monitoring the due application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, observing local and regional elections, and issuing recommendations to the governments of the 47 Council of Europe member states.

*It upholds local self-government, together with democracy and human rights at local level.*



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