

ACTIVITY REPORT

(April – mid-December 2017)



Communication by the Secretary General
of the Congress of Local and regional Authorities

At the 1302bis meeting of the Ministers' Deputies
13 December 2017

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Activity Report of the Congress

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**Communication by the Secretary General of the Congress at the
1302bis meeting of the Ministers' Deputies**

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Communication by Andreas KIEFER, Secretary General of the Congress



Twice a year the Congress Secretary General presents a report on the activities of the Congress, its members and its secretariat to the Committee of Ministers' Deputies, which complements the annual political exchange of views of the Deputies with the President of the Congress. This introduction is based on the oral presentation delivered when presenting the second activity report for 2017 on 13 December 2017.

This report which covers the last eight months since the end of March 2017 is also published on the Congress website. It contains the results of the last Congress Session held in October, achieved results, the on-going and the upcoming work and information about the working conditions in the Congress.

It shows that, beyond the sessions, much of the Congress' work is being done in monitoring and field missions, in political dialogue with member States and in co-operation programmes, in the committees, in our co-ordination with the intergovernmental sector and with our external partners like the Committee of the Regions of the EU. The concrete results of much of this work will surface at a later stage in the form of reports, joint events and handbooks or toolkits, for example. We produced a folder on "Thematic activities" (<https://goo.gl/wTfcPS>) with direct access to the most relevant Congress and Council of Europe-documents which is widely used by our members and partners in the member states and the national associations of local and regional authorities.

The political context

Before addressing some specific topics presented in greater detail in the written report reference has to be made to the role of mayors and councillors, presidents and members of regional governments and parliaments or assemblies in addressing the current challenges and in contributing to the solutions that affect the everyday life of citizens.

The convention system of the Council of Europe was established by its member States in order to develop "individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law, principles which form the basis of all genuine democracy" (Preamble to the Statute of the Council of Europe). The tasks entrusted to the Congress by the Committee of Ministers aim at contributing to achieving these objectives at the local and regional level.

In addition to its consultative role vis-à-vis the Committee of Ministers, the Congress has a monitoring role (assessment of the compliance to the European Charter on Local Self Government and

observation of local elections) and is an effective multiplying agent for the Organisation's policies and political priorities. Furthermore the Congress and its secretariat implement parts of Council of Europe Action Plans on the ground – funded by voluntary contributions.

Congress contribution to the mission of the Organisation

As examples of recent activities, Congress activities in the fight against radicalisation leading to terrorism (3rd summit of mayors held in Barcelona in November) and the toolkit for local authorities for organising inter-cultural and inter-religious activities in order to create mutual understanding and respect and to avoid tensions have to be mentioned. It is here that local and regional politicians come into the game. The values of the Council of Europe have to be implemented also at the local level. This requires capable politicians, accountable to their electorate who enjoy the trust of the people and who contribute to heightening the trust for politicians and political institutions in general. This well-governed Europe at local level needs elected representatives and administrations that remain resilient against the temptations of corruption and election manipulation – to name just two challenges. This is also why the Congress Bureau decided in its last meeting on 4 December 2017 to amend the rules and procedures on ethical behaviour of Congress members and agreed to consult the Council of Europe anti-corruption body GRECO on this.

Weaving and maintaining a tight fabric of democracy and social cohesion requires personalities who are willing and able to safeguard the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups and to prove the quality of democracy every day. It is local authorities that apply democracy and human rights close to the citizen and bind our societies together, these societies of which we are so justifiably proud – and of which a large part of the world is very envious.

This model, however, is under threat. The Congress, as the political assembly of these mayors and councillors, is the communication centre and hub to disseminate not only the values and legal standards of the Council of Europe but also good practices across the wider Europe. The Congress and its secretariat base their work on the Conventions and Charters developed by member States in the framework of the Council of Europe. And failure of this system would be a threat for democracy and human rights at the level of the member States themselves.

No government can ignore the role of local and regional authorities and their elected leaders managing the living together, ensuring social cohesion and inclusion. This European model of society is no longer characterised by vertical hierarchies but has developed over the last decades in the direction of decentralisation. Going back to recentralisation would not reflect the expectations of the people, who are ready to take responsibility for their communities – based on the principle of subsidiarity. Local democracy is never completely finished. It requires special and continuous care. And for this it also needs the Council of Europe and its convention system with the inter-dependence of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Critical mass needed

The current political and financial situation of the Organisation is a difficult one. In the Congress we are convinced that it is indispensable to maintain critical mass and economies of scale in order to achieve meaningful impact of our work, in particular as regards monitoring of local and regional democracy and observation of local elections, the core statutory activities of the Congress, as well as holding the meetings of the committees and the Session, where the reports are discussed and adopted and then transmitted to the Committee of Ministers. If extra-budgetary resources are available they shall continue to be used to implement activities in member States focusing on developing the "human capital" as reliable and resilient actors for democracy as well as the legal and institutional framework. This also applies for Congress activities in the framework of the Council of Europe neighbourhood policy – notably in order to contribute to establishing local self-government in Tunisia and Morocco.

The Congress has been guided by a spirit of constant reform and search for improvement and impact, very much in synch with the reform agenda of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. Congress President Mosler-Törnström referred to this in her exchange of views with the Committee of Ministers on 25 October 2017, namely the need for a proportional budgetary approach, in order to safeguard a share of three per cent for the Congress in the Council of Europe budget.

Member States have the possibility to fund specific thematic activities of the Council of Europe according to their own priorities in addition to their statutory contributions to the ordinary budget of the organisation. In the current discussion the institutional functioning of the organs and statutory bodies, however, must not be forgotten as a matter for the ordinary budget.

Outlook for 2018

In 2018, the Congress will continue to focus its efforts and action on monitoring and improving the situation of local and regional democracy, which is at the heart of its mission.

The report and recommendation on recurring issues from monitoring the European Charter of Local Self-government (ECLSG) adopted in the March 2017 Session and the reply of the Committee of Ministers will be discussed with the Committee of Ministers' Group of Rapporteurs on Democracy at one of its next meetings

In complement to this, a debate will be organised in the March Session 2018 about the challenges for smaller member states in the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government: The Congress will discuss the monitoring reports about Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino and invite ministers concerned from these countries and from Malta to a debate on these challenges.

Furthermore, in accordance to the working programme of the Congress several monitoring visit, local elections observation missions and fact-finding missions are scheduled for 2018. Other forthcoming highlights include the presentation of a Human Rights Manual for local and regional authorities as a practical tool for addressing human rights challenges in our communities and the organisation of a fourth Summit of Mayors for the Alliance of European Cities against Violent Extremism.

I. POLITICAL AGENDA



Exchange of views of the Secretary General of the Congress with the Committee of Ministers, 19 April 2017

The 32nd session of the Congress and the work carried out by the Congress since the end of November 2016 were the subject of the communication to the Ministers' Deputies by the Congress Secretary General Andreas KIEFER who stressed in particular the importance of the debates held during the Session on the situation of local and regional democracy in several member states in the presence of the ministers of these countries (Estonia, Finland, Iceland and Malta). The written report on the activities of the Congress since end November was made available on this occasion.

Bilateral meeting with the President of Greece, 26 April 2017

The meeting between the President of the Congress Gudrun MOSLER- TÖRSNSTRÖM and the President of Greece, Prokopios PAVLOPOULOS, took place during the session of the Parliamentary Assembly. The Congress President recalled the importance of the role of local and regional authorities in the face of the difficulties facing Greece today. In particular, she stressed the essential role of towns and regions in the reception and integration of refugees, despite the inadequate means at their disposal'. In this perspective, she called for greater European solidarity with Greece. The Greek President, for his part, welcomed the work and support that Congress was giving to his country.

Statement on the International day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, 17 May 2017

The Congress President– as well as other members of the Congress - addressed video messages to call on decision-makers and citizens to defend the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people around the slogan 'Come out for Human Rights!'. For many years the Congress has been promoting the implementation of grassroots initiatives and policies to guarantee the rights of LGBTI people and to combat discrimination against them.

127th Session of the Committee of Ministers, 19 May 2017

The Congress President highlighted the difficulties and threats Europe was facing today and underlined that in this context, more than ever, the contribution of local and regional elected representatives to the work of central governments is indispensable. She congratulated the Cypriot Government on their excellent Chairmanship and highlighted the fruitful co-operation that the Congress has had with them. She wished success to the incoming Czech Chairmanship and said the

Congress was looking forward to continuing in the same spirit of co-operation and dynamic work with the new Chairmanship.

Bilateral meeting with the President of Greece, 25 May 2017

This second meeting between the President of the Congress Gudrun MOSLER- TÖRSNSTRÖM and the President of Greece Prokopios PAVLOPOULOS took place in Athens, together with the head of the Greek delegation to the Congress, Michalis ANGELOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CCE). They held a wide-ranging exchange of views on the situation of refugees in Greece and the role of local authorities in this connection, and particularly of the island municipalities which shoulder much of the responsibility for receiving refugees. They also touched more broadly on the role of local and regional authorities in the Council of Europe's member States as well as the political dialogue those authorities need to initiate with central authorities regarding the main challenges they face.

Conference on “Public policies, democracy, rights and transparency in local governments”, 7 June 2017

Addressing this conference in Athens, the Congress President referred to the results of two monitoring visits made by the Congress in Greece in 2014. She underlined the situation of Greek regions which were explicitly excluded from the scope of application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government at the occasion of the ratification of the Charter in 1989. She explained that in 2017, the territorial structure of Greece has changed and the Kallikratis reform had redefined the first and second level local authorities mentioned in the Constitution – at present the municipalities and the regions. In its recommendation, the Congress called on the Greek authorities to extend the scope of the Charter to the second tier of local government, namely the regions, by amending the existing legislation. This follow-up to the monitoring report consists of a political dialogue of national, regional and local authorities with the Congress, in order to develop and to agree on a timeline to implement the Congress recommendations for the country.

General Assembly of the Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities (TÖÖSZ), 8 June 2017.

The Congress President attended the General Assembly of TÖÖSZ in Budapest and underlined that national associations of local authorities are the key partners for the Congress, in rolling out its activities, in listening and in dialogue, in devising its policies and priorities for the future. The President welcomed the involvement of Hungarian cities in E-Democracy and the key role played by Hungary on Roma issues. She invited more Hungarian mayors to sign the “Declaration of Mayors and elected local and regional representatives of Council of Europe member states against anti-Gypsyism”, launched during the Session of the Congress in March 2017.

Official visit to the Czech Republic, 15 June 2017

The Congress President held bilateral meetings in Prague with the Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs Lubomir ZAROLEK, the Vice-Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, Jana FISCHEROVA and the Deputy-Minister of Interior Petr MISNA. The Congress President highlighted the importance for the Congress to develop a political dialogue with the governments of the member States during their chairmanships. She also stressed the importance for the Congress to have a good cooperation with the national associations of local and regional authorities, which can help to implement the Congress' recommendations and give the Congress' work greater visibility in the member States. On 16 June, the President chaired the meeting of the Bureau of the Congress in the capital city of Moravia, Brno, at the invitation of the Czech Union of Towns and Municipalities and the Mayor of Brno.

Bilateral meeting with the Prime Minister of Moldova, 26 June 2017

A meeting between the President of the Congress and the Prime Minister of Moldova Pavel FILIP took place during the session of the parliamentary Assembly. They discussed the political situation in the country as well as the forthcoming reforms of central and local government. Prime Minister FILIP said Moldova would take into account the advice of the Council of Europe Venice Commission on a new electoral law and would also highly appreciate to benefit from the Congress' expertise in the field of decentralisation. The President of the Congress also drew the Prime Minister's attention to the situation of the Mayor of Chisinau and Vice-President of the Congress, Dorin Chirtoaca, at the time under home arrest.

Bilateral meeting with the Prime Minister of Montenegro, 27 June 2017

The President of the Congress met with the Prime Minister of Montenegro Duško MARKOVIĆ took place during the session of the Parliamentary Assembly. They discussed the situation of local and regional democracy in the country as well as other issues such as the economic crisis, the problems of corruption and radicalisation and the crisis of refugees and migrants. The Prime Minister underlined that his country was committed to the European Charter of Local self-government and would seek to reach the highest level of decentralisation.

Election of Karl-Heinz Lambertz as President of the European Committee of the Regions, 12 July 2017

The Congress President congratulated Congress Vice-President Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ who was newly elected as President of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). She said she was convinced that this election would ensure that the voice of the regions and the cities will be heard at the level of all European institutions and that the regions in particular will be more and more involved in the European Union decision-making process. She underlined also that the existing cooperation with the CoR would be further developed and strengthened with this election.

Statement on the Catalan referendum, 2 October 2017

The Congress President called on the Spanish Government and the Region of Catalonia to commit to a political dialogue which is the only feasible way forward in a modern democracy. She regretted the violence that marked the referendum in Catalonia on 1. October 2017 and added that the decision of the Catalan regional authorities to carry out an illegal referendum was already fraught with risk. She considered that flagrantly unconstitutional decision to be lacking in the sense of responsibility which should guide the executive of a large region.

Exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies, 25 October 2017

The Congress President presented the activities of the Congress during its 33rd session, in particular the debate on the situation in Catalonia, in which members had very clearly expressed their belief that dialogue was the only possible option. She underlined that the Congress's role was to help strengthen local and regional democracy in the member states but did not want "exemplary devolution at the price of a fragmented Europe"

Official visit to Armenia, 8-12 November 2017

The Congress President met with many high representatives of the national authorities including Prime Minister Karen KARAPETYAN, the Minister of Territorial Administration and development Davit LOKYAN and the Speaker of the Parliament Ara BABLOYAN. She expressed the Congress' support for the ongoing process of consolidating local and regional democracy in the country. She also met with elected representatives of the communities of Erevan and Abovyan and members of the Armenian delegation to the Congress as well as the President of the Communities Association of Armenia, Congress member Emin YERITSYAN. This visit was intended to strengthen the political dialogue with the Armenian authorities, to support the implementation of the Congress recommendations and to review the state of implementation of the road map in view of the forthcoming monitoring of Armenia in 2018.

On 10 November the President opened the first Forum for Local Democracy in Armenia entitled "Outlook for the future: a new agenda for decentralisation" organised jointly by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and development and the Association of Communities of Armenia under the auspices of the Congress within the framework of its co-operation programme in Armenia (sponsored by Switzerland).

Transfer of Committee of Ministers Chairmanship, 15 November 2017

The Congress President thanked the Czech Foreign Minister Lubomir ZAORALEK for the openness, the cooperation and the priority given to local and regional democracy during the Czech chairmanship and ensured Anders SAMUELSEN, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark that the Congress will support the Danish priorities, namely human rights, gender equality, involvement of children and young people in democracy and the fight against discrimination of persons with disabilities.

Statement on the European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, 18 November 2017

The Congress President stated that cities and regions are at the forefront in the implementation of children's rights-based policies and concrete action to protect children against sexual violence. She stressed that it was the role of local public authorities responsible for the reception of refugees and migrants in their cities and regions, to do their best to create safe spaces in reception centres, especially for children who are unaccompanied or separated from their families.

Statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November 2017

The Congress President declared that local authorities, because of their responsibilities, particularly in the field of social policies, must initiate and accompany such change to prevent from any form of violence against women. She called on local and regional authorities to put pressure on those governments which have not yet done so, to sign and ratify the "Istanbul Convention", the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, ratified so far by 27 member States out of 47.

High-level visit to Ukraine, 20-22 November 2017

A delegation of the Congress led by President Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM, and composed of Gunn Marit HELGESEN (Norway, EPP/CCE), President of the Chamber of Regions, Yuliya SVITLYCHNA (Ukraine, ILDG), Vice-President of the Congress, Leendert VERBEEK (Netherlands, SOC), President of the Monitoring Committee and Marc COOLS (Belgium, ILDG), rapporteur on local democracy in Ukraine. They met with the Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine and Minister of Regional Development, Building and Housing and Communal Services of Ukraine, the Speaker of the Parliament, the Mayor of Kyiv and the Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for the Affairs of Crimean Tatars. The Congress President welcomed the political will of the Ukrainian authorities to pave the way for the next monitoring of local and regional democracy in Ukraine, to take place in the second half of 2018. The representatives of the Ukrainian authorities also re-confirmed their commitment to implement the Road Map on the post-monitoring dialogue, signed with the Congress in 2015, and to pursue the development of the local self-government and decentralisation reform, based on the principles and standards of the European Charter of Local Self-Government as well as the Congress' recommendations. On 22 November, the Congress President participated in a roundtable on "Strengthening local and regional democracy in Ukraine", organised within the project "Promoting local democracy in Ukraine" and the Council of Europe Action Plan 2015 - 2017 for Ukraine (see also VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS).

II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES



A. 33rd SESSION OF THE CONGRESS

The overarching theme of the two 2017 sessions was “Decentralised policies for the successful integration of migrants”. In the second session of 2017, the Congress held a debate on the specific problem of the reception of unaccompanied refugee minors with the testimony of three young refugees (see IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES).

A current affairs debate was held on the situation of Catalonia in Spain. The President of the Congress introduced the debate, pointing out that the only feasible way forward in any modern democracy is calm political dialogue. Many Congress members stressed that local and regional governance must develop in compliance with the rule of law, which ensures democratic checks and balances.

Members also examined the issue of young people and open government in the fight against corruption in a debate which included the presentation of a report on transparent public procurement at local and regional level and an exchange of views on the youth perspective on the fight against corruption. Other thematic debates concerned the situation in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the role of European regional associations and organisations in co-operation and regional democracy in Europe and women’s participation in political life at regional level. Reports examined for adoption included “Regional and minority languages in Europe today” and “A better future for Europe’s rural areas”. The debate on the latter report was held in the presence of Austrian Minister of Agriculture, Forest, Environment and Water management Andrä RUPPRECHTER who presented Austria’s Master Plan for Rural Areas”.

In the context of its monitoring activities, the Congress examined reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in Switzerland, Italy and Serbia and debated the conclusions of a fact-finding mission conducted in Belgium on the functioning of the organs of local democracy in a context of linguistic diversity in the “communes with facilities” in the Flemish region around Brussels. It also examined the report concerning the situation of Dorin CHIRTOACA, Mayor of Chişinău and Vice-president of the Congress. A recommendation on the observation of the local elections in Finland was adopted and the conclusions of the report on the elections to the Council of Elders in Yerevan were presented (see also III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY).

This session also offered the opportunity to celebrate two anniversaries: the 10th anniversary of European Local Democracy Week and the 10th anniversary of the Congress' Dosta! Prize (see also IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES).

Petr MLSNA, Deputy Minister for Legislation and Archiving, on behalf of the Chair of the Committee of Ministers and Thorbjørn JAGLAND, Secretary General of the Council of Europe held an exchange of views with the Congress members.

Forty 40 young people, aged 16 to 30, from 40 Council of Europe member States, attended their second session this year as youth delegates. This time, they presented the projects the grass-roots projects they had worked on since the previous session, presented the youth perspective in the corruption debate and contributed actively to other plenary and chamber debates and committee meetings (see also IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES).

B. THE BUREAU

Brno (Czech Republic), 16 June 2017

The members of the Congress Bureau met in Brno in the framework of the Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. The meeting was preceded by an exchange of views with representatives of Czech local and regional authorities. Bureau members discussed in particular the situation in Turkey, Georgia and Ukraine, as well as requests for partnership with the Congress. Other matters on the agenda included the South-Mediterranean Partnership, relations between the Council of Europe and the European Union, and the organisation of forthcoming Congress sessions.

Paris, 15 September 2017

The Bureau held an exchange of views with Ambassador Laima JUREVICIENE, Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the Council of Europe and current Chair of the GR-DEM (Committee of Ministers Rapporteur Group on Democracy). The Ambassador welcomed the work of the Congress, in particular the monitoring of local and regional democracy, and invited the Congress to present the recurring issues identified by the Congress in the course of its monitoring and election observation visits at one of the next GR-DEM meetings. The agenda also included the situation of local and regional democracy in Turkey, Ukraine, Romania, and Armenia, the preparation of the next sessions of the Congress, in particular the 33rd session, and an item on co-operation with Morocco and Tunisia. The Bureau also examined the arrangements for observing local elections in the "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (15 October 2017) and Georgia (21 October 2017) and considered a draft preliminary resolution on the future of the European Local Democracy Week.

Strasbourg, 17 and 19 October 2017

The Bureau of the Congress met on the eve of the 33rd Session and approved the session agenda. Among decisions taken at that meeting were the holding of a current affairs debate on the situation of Catalonia in Spain and the examination of a draft report concerning the situation of Dorin Chirtoaca, vice-president of the Congress and mayor of Chisinau (Republic of Moldova), who had been under house arrest since 26 May 2017 and suspended from his office of mayor. The Bureau further decided to closely monitor the situation of Gültan Kisanak and Nurhayat Altun, held in the F-type high-security prison in Kocaeli, north-western Turkey. The Bureau highlighted the opinion issued by the Venice Commission on "provisions in the Emergency Decree Law No. 674 of Turkey concerning the exercise of local Democracy in Turkey" in response to a request from the Congress.

In addition, the President of the Congress presented the main features of the planned high-level visit to Ukraine on 21 and 22 November 2017, including a round table on the implementation of the Congress roadmap in the context of post-monitoring dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities. The Bureau also discussed the policy of the Congress towards neighbouring regions, examined the co-operation activities carried out by the Congress in Council of Europe member States and non-member States and adopted the revised statute of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government. At its meeting on the last day of the session, amongst other things the Bureau adopted several terms of reference for committee reports and activities.

Paris, 4 December 2017

For its last meeting in 2017, the Bureau held an exchange of views on the latest developments concerning the situation of Dorin Chirtoaca, Mayor of Chişinău and Vice-president of the Congress.

Following the adoption by the Congress of a report during its October Session, a fact-finding visit to Chisinau is scheduled in this regard on 13 December. It will be led by Congress Vice-President and Rapporteur on Moldova, Gunn Marit HELGESEN (Norway, EPP.CCE). The outcome of this visit, as well as the opinion of the Venice Commission on local recall referenda which was requested by the Congress in October 2017, will be examined at the next meeting of the Bureau in February 2018.

The Bureau was also informed about the positive developments in the Congress' co-operation with Tunisia and Morocco. It reviewed the situation of Nurhayat Altun, member of the Congress, currently detained in Kocaeli, north-western Turkey and decided to follow up the information that Ms Altun would not be allowed to attend her forthcoming trial. The Bureau decided to revise the Congress Rules and Procedures in order to further codify the ethical behavior of its members and approved a draft timeline for this revision. It agreed to ask for the opinion of the Council of Europe Group of States against corruption (GRECO) on the measures to be taken. Finally, the members were informed about the budgetary situation of the Council of Europe and the Congress for 2018 and the preparation of the Congress sessions for 2018 (27-29 March and 6-8 November 2018).

C. THE CHAMBERS

The Chamber of Local Authorities



The Chamber of Local Authorities held its 33rd Session on 19 October 2017. In his communication, President Anders KNAPE (Sweden, EPP.CCE) highlighted the collaboration of the Congress with the Venice Commission with regard to legal and constitutional issues relating to the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the observation local elections. He also observed that the Congress was encountering more and more issues relating to the use of languages in local administrations and announced that the Governance Committee would prepare a report on this issue.

The Chamber held a debate on the situation in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina with regard to the electoral deadlock in that city, on the basis of an information report presented by Stewart DICKSON, (United Kingdom, ILDG), during which members urged the authorities at all levels to work towards a sustainable solution to this problem.

The Chamber also adopted a report on the functioning of the organs of local democracy in a context of linguistic diversity in the “communes with facilities” in the Flemish region around Brussels (Belgium), in which the Congress asked the national authorities to review the way in which language laws were applied in “communes with facilities”, in order to allow the use of both French and Dutch by municipal councillors in the exercise of their local mandates (see also III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY).

Finally, the Chamber adopted reports on the elections to the Council of Elders of Yerevan, Armenia, on 14 May 2017 and the local elections in Finland on 9 April, in which it welcomed the high degree of transparency in the electoral process and the efforts made by the authorities to strengthen the position of female candidates (see also III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY).

The Chamber of Regions



The Chamber of Regions held its 33rd Session on 19 October 2017. Its President Gunn Marit HELGESEN (Norway, EPP/CCE) presented her communication where she defined the regions as bridges between central power and local communities, between national authorities and citizens. She underlined the importance of considering the regional identities and defending regional interests within the framework of the States. She said the regional dimension is a driving force for integrating ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity within the broader national identity. She also reaffirmed the Congress' commitment to the principle of national unity as the foundation for regional self-government.

The Chamber held a debate on regional democracy in Europe, analysing the mechanisms for ensuring dialogue between national and regional authorities, the role of regions in European integration and the participation of regional associations in this process.

The Chamber adopted a resolution and a recommendation joint to the report on Regional and minority languages in Europe today. Rapporteurs Lelia HUNZIKER (Switzerland, SOC) and Anna MAGYAR (Hungary, EPP/CCE) underlined the importance of measures to consolidate and develop regional or minority language teaching as well as education in these languages in the regions where they are spoken. Vesna CRNIC-GROTIC, Chair of the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, highlighted the need for support in ratifying the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which has at present only 25 States Parties out of 47 member States. She launched an invitation to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Charter in 2018.

The Chamber also held a thematic debate on women's participation in political life at regional level. The guest speakers - Elena CENTEMERO, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly and Simone SUSSKIND, Member of the Parliament of Brussels-Capital Region and president of the "Actions in the Mediterranean" association - stressed the difficulties that women face in accessing political careers. The debate came up with proposals for increasing women's participation to political life at regional level such as the introduction of effective quotas in electoral lists (using the binomial system); measures for conciliating political engagement and family life; support to women's networking. For its part, the Congress has introduced strict rules on gender balance in its structures.

D. THE COMMITTEES

Monitoring Committee

The Committee met in the city of Kharkiv on 27 June 2017. In a message by President Petro POROSHENKO to the Committee, the Ukrainian authorities underlined, in particular, the role of the Congress for the further development of local self-government in the country. During the meeting, draft monitoring reports on Switzerland, Serbia and Italy, on the fact-finding mission to Belgium ('functioning of the organs of local democracy in the context of linguistic diversity in the communes with facilities in the Flemish region around Brussels') and on electoral observation missions in Finland and Yerevan (Armenia) were adopted.

The Monitoring Committee met again in Strasbourg on 18 October 2017, during the 33rd Session. It elected Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, ILDG), member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, as the Committee's 5th vice-chair. The Committee examined the contents of letters raising issues related to the proper functioning of local democracy in Poland, Moldova, Ukraine, Romania and Armenia.

Congress Spokesperson on Human Rights, Harald BERGMANN (Netherlands, ILDG), presented to the members a Human Rights Manual, that brings together good practice all over Europe at local and regional levels. The publication will be dedicated to non-discrimination against three groups: refugees, asylum seekers and migrants; Roma and Travellers; LGBT persons. Taking a global approach, the manual will provide a compendium of good practices, some of them ground-breaking, in integration and awareness-building initiatives to provide optimum support for local elected representatives.

In addition, members were also informed of recent Monitoring activities (notably on September, in Latvia) and of elections observations carried out in "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", on 15 October. Finally, the Committee approved a mandate to draw up a report on "Voting rights at local level of internally displaced persons and migrants".

The next meeting of the Monitoring Committee will be held in Strasbourg on 14 February 2018.

Governance Committee

During its meeting on 4 May 2017, in Eupen (Belgium), the Committee approved reports on "A better future for Europe's rural areas" and on "Making Public Procurement transparent at local and regional level", which highlighted risks connected with corruption in the procurement process as well as presented counter measures including training, awareness raising and improvement of overall transparency in the process. Both of these reports were subsequently adopted at the Congress plenary session in October. The Committee also examined draft reports including "Transparency and Open Government", "Conflicts of interests at local and regional levels" and "Protecting Whistleblowers".

The Committee Meeting was followed by a conference on 5 May 2017 on "Successful territorial reform", where academic experts, practitioners and local and regional politicians discussed positive developments and current challenges to territorial reform, particularly in regards to amalgamations of municipalities.

The Governance Committee's next meeting took place in Strasbourg on 18 October 2017, in the margin of the 33rd Session. In the framework of the Congress' Roadmap of activities for preventing corruption and promoting public ethics at local and regional levels, the Committee looked at reports on "Nepotism (recruitment of staff)", "Transparency and Open Government", and "Conflicts of interests at local and regional levels". The members also examined an information note on the "Fair distribution of taxes in transfrontier areas", presented by Karl Heinz LAMBERTZ (Belgium, SOC), and draft "Guidelines on the right of local authorities to be consulted by higher levels of government", presented by Anders KNAPE (Sweden, EPP/CCE). In addition the Committee approved terms of reference for the preparation of a report on "the use of languages by local and regional authorities" and the organisation of a conference on the same theme, in 2018, in Romania.

The Committee will next meet in Strasbourg on 27 March 2018 in the margin of the 34th Congress session.

Current Affairs Committee

The summer meeting of the Current Affairs Committee took place in Belgrade, Serbia on 14 June 2017. It began with a discussion on the conclusions of the Seminar on the Congress Pact of Towns

and Regions to stop Sexual Violence Against Children, held the previous day with the National Associations of Local and Regional Authorities, during which the Mayors of Belgrade, Kragujevac and Surdulica signed the Pact, a document opened to signature in 2012. The Committee also held a round table with several experts on the situation of regional and minority languages in Europe today, presented by Rapporteurs Lelia HUNZIKER (Switzerland, SOC) and Anna Magyar (Hungary, EPP/CCE). The members approved the preparation of a report on refugee children and unaccompanied minors in Europe and the role and responsibilities of local and regional authorities and appointed Nawel RAFIK-ELMRINI (France, SOC) as rapporteur. Finally, members discussed the preparation of the 3rd Summit of the Alliance of European Cities against Violent Extremism, to be held in Barcelona in November 2017.

The Current Affairs Committee met again in Strasbourg on 18 October 2017, during the 33rd Session. It adopted the report on unaccompanied refugee children prepared by Nawel RAFIK ELMRINI (France, SOC), and a report on border regions faced with the phenomenon of migration, prepared by Rena DOUROU (Greece, SOC). These reports will be presented to the Congress for adoption in March and October 2018 respectively. The Committee also examined a petition concerning the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, signed by 150 NGOs and presented to the Congress by the County council of Covasna, Romania. In addition, the Committee received the signature document from the town of Bela Palanka (Serbia) which had signed up to the Congress Pact to stop sexual violence against children. The members were also informed of the programme of the Summit of mayors for the 'Alliance of European cities against violent extremism' scheduled for 15 November 2017 in Barcelona, Spain. Jointly organised by the Congress, the European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS) and the City of Barcelona, the Summit brought together local and regional elected representatives, experts and representatives of civil society to look at good practices for preventing extremist violence.

The Committee will next meet in Strasbourg on 27 March 2018 in the margin of the 34th Congress session.

III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY

A. MONITORING ACTIVITIES



The core mission of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is the effective monitoring of the situation of local and regional democracy in member States by assessing the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted in 1985 and ratified by the 47 member States of the Council of Europe.

Monitoring visits

Since April 2017, the Congress made the following five monitoring visits

Principality of Andorra, 25-26 April 2017

The Congress delegation was composed of co-rapporteurs Gaye DOGANOGLU (Turkey, EPP-CCE) and Zdenek BROZ (Czech Republic, ECR), who examined the situation of local democracy in Andorra in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the country in 2011. High level meetings took place, in particular with the Head of Principality of Andorra government, and the Minister of Finance. The delegation also met with the President of the Court of Auditors, the Vice-President of the General Council (Parliament), the President of the Constitutional Court, as well as the Ombudsman (El Raonador del Ciutadà),

Principality of Monaco, 16-17 May 2017

The Congress delegation was composed of co-rapporteurs Michail ANGELOPOULOS (Greece, EPP-CCE) and Marianne HOLLINGER (Switzerland, ILDG), who examined the situation of local democracy in Monaco in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the Principality in 2013. High level meetings took place, in particular with the Government Councillor – Minister of Interior of the Principality of Monaco. The delegation also met with the Mayor of Monaco and President of the national delegation of Monaco to the Congress, the President of the National Council, the President of the Supreme Audit Commission, the Vice-President of the Supreme Court as well as the High Commissioner on protection of rights, freedoms and mediation. Finally, the rapporteurs held discussions with representatives of the national delegation of Monaco to the Congress.

Principality of Liechtenstein, 6-7 June 2017

The Congress delegation was composed of co-rapporteurs Artur TORRES PEREIRA (Portugal, EPP-CCE) et Marie KAUFMANN (Czech Republic, ILDG), who examined the situation of local democracy in Liechtenstein in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government,

ratified by the Principality in 1988. High level meetings were scheduled, in particular with the Prime Minister, the Minister of General Government Affairs and Finance and the Minister of Home Affairs, Education and Environment. The delegation also met with the President of the Parliament (Landtag), the President of the State Court, as well as the Mayor of Vaduz and President of Mayor's Conference of Liechtenstein, the Mayor of Planken, and the Mayor of Triesenberg. Finally, the rapporteurs held discussions with the national delegation of Liechtenstein to the Congress and representatives of the Association for Human Rights in Liechtenstein.

San Marino, 13-14 June 2017

For this first monitoring visit, the delegation was composed of co-rapporteurs Harald BERGMANN (Netherlands, ILDG) and Gunnar AXEL AXELSSON (Iceland, SOC), who examined the situation of local democracy in San Marino in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the country in 2013. High level meetings were scheduled, in particular with the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Finances and Budget and the Minister for Territory, Environment, Agriculture, Tourism and Civil Protection. The delegation also met with the Township Council Secretary (Capitano di Castello), the President of the Guarantors' Panel on the Constitutionality of Rules, Members of the Public Finance Control Commission, as well as the Mayors of Borgo Maggiore and Acquaviva.

Latvia, 12-14 September 2017

The Congress delegation was composed of co-rapporteurs Xavier CADORET (France, SOC) and Marc COOLS (Belgium, ILDG), who examined the situation of local democracy in Latvia in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the country in 1996. High level meetings were scheduled, in particular with the Minister of Finance and the Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development. The delegation also met with the Chairman of the Public Administration and Local Government Parliament's Committee, the Chairman of the Budget and Finance Parliament's Committee, the Ombudsman, as well as the Vice-President of the Constitutional Court and the Auditor General for the State Audit Office.

Recommendations adopted

In the course of its 33rd Session from 18 to 20 October 2017, the Congress adopted the three following recommendations:

Recommendation 403(2017) on local and regional democracy in Serbia

The Congress adopted the report and the recommendation following a monitoring visit to the country from 28 February to 2 March 2017 by co-rapporteurs, Sören SCHUMACHER, (Germany, SOC), and Lucia KROON, (Netherlands, EPP/CCE). The report underlines that the situation in Serbia has been seriously affected by the economic crisis. It recalls that Serbia responded positively to most of the previous recommendations made by the Congress in 2011, in particular through adopting legislative changes. However, it regrets that the progress in the implementation of the Public Administration Reform Strategy, adopted by the Government in 2014, has not been uniform. Therefore, the Congress encourages Serbian authorities to further pursue the declared objectives of the reform by finalising the legislative projects related to local and regional democracy and decentralisation and by ensuring their effective implementation. The Rapporteurs also expressed their concerns about the challenges that Serbia faces in respect of conformity with the provisions of the Charter, in particular the possibility of dismissal of local government assemblies by the government, the lack of transparent criteria for allocating State grants and the failure to implement the constitutional provision concerning the budget of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

Finally, the Congress recommends that the Serbian authorities provide adequate resources for local government to carry out its functions and improve the transparency of the criteria for approving the hiring of local government staff under the temporary ban on recruitment. It also calls on the national authorities to enact a Law on Financing the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

Recommendation 404(2017) on local and regional democracy in Italy

The Congress adopted the report and the recommendation following a monitoring visit to the country in March 2017 by co-rapporteurs Jakob WIENEN (Netherlands, EPP/CCE) and Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, ILDG). The Congress invites the Italian authorities to reconsider, on the basis of consultations, the criteria for calculating budget cuts and to lift financial constraints imposed on local authorities to ensure that sufficient financial resources are available to them. It recommends clarifying

the powers and responsibilities of the provinces and metropolitan cities by re-introducing direct elections of their governing bodies, providing for adequate financial remuneration of their representatives and revising the current limitations in relation to local human resources. The Congress also recommends that the Italian authorities ensure greater fiscal autonomy for regions with ordinary status to reduce the differences between them and regions with special status.

Recommendation 407(2017) on local and regional democracy in Switzerland

The Congress adopted the report and the recommendation following a monitoring visit to Bern, Zurich and Oetwil an der Limmat by co-rapporteurs Marc COOLS (Belgium, ILDG) and Dorin CHIRTOACA (Republic of Moldova, EPP/CCE) from 23 to 25 January 2017. The conclusions of this second monitoring visit since Switzerland ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 2005 were particularly positive. The report underlines the fact that municipal self-government is particularly deeply rooted in Switzerland, and that direct-democracy procedures are highly developed at all levels of governance. It goes on to highlight various points which need to be examined by the Swiss authorities in order to further improve the democratic framework, such as better direct involvement of municipalities in decision-making procedures, and the possibility of extending the scope of the Charter to the cantons – in consultation with the cantons – in order to preserve their autonomy vis-à-vis the Confederation.

B. FACT FINDING MISSIONS

Moldova

During its 33rd Session, the Congress examined the report presented by Rapporteur Gunn Marit HELGESEN (Norway, EPP.CCE) concerning the situation of Dorin CHIRTOACA, Mayor of Chişinău and Vice-president of the Congress. Ms HELGESEN had visited Chişinău in August 2017 and met Mr CHIRTOACA, who had been under house arrest since 26 May 2017 and suspended from his office of mayor. She also met with the Prosecutor of the National Anti-corruption Centre, representatives of the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM) and the Minister of Justice.

The situation of the mayor of Chisinau raises the concern of the Congress, particularly with regard to the non-respect of several articles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by Moldova in 1997. In particular, the report underlines the fact that the elected mayor of the capital of the Republic of Moldova has been suspended by a judicial authority. The replacement of the mayor by an unelected local government officer and the organisation of a local recall referendum, scheduled for November and aimed at curtailing the mayor's term of office, is also a matter of concern for the Congress.

The Congress undertook to closely monitor the situation of the Mayor of Chişinău by organising a fact-finding mission which will give rise to a recommendation on the basis of the commitments made by the Republic of Moldova on local democracy. It also requested an opinion from the Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe ("Venice Commission") on the constitutionality of the local recall referendum scheduled for 19 November 2017.

All this information will be taken into account in the monitoring exercise on the situation of local and regional democracy in the Republic of Moldova planned for 2018, particularly in the light of the complaint sent to the Congress in the meantime by the Moldovan Association Local Authorities (CALM), which denounces numerous pressures being brought to bear on local elected representatives through court proceedings.

Belgium

During its 33rd Session, the Congress adopted a report and Recommendation 309(2017) on the functioning of the organs of local democracy in a context of linguistic diversity in the "communes with facilities" in the Flemish region around Brussels (Belgium). The report follows a fact-finding mission on 2 and 3 February 2017 by co-rapporteurs Henrik HAMMAR (Sweden, EPP/CCE) and David ERAY (Switzerland, ILDG). In the recommendation adopted, the Congress asks the Belgian authorities to do away with the system requiring the Flemish Minister of the Interior to make appointments. It also asks the national authorities to review the way in which language laws are applied in "communes with facilities", in order to allow the use of both French and Dutch by municipal councillors in the exercise of their local mandates.

C. OBSERVATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS



Over the last 15 years, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has observed more than 100 local and regional elections in Council of Europe member States and occasionally also beyond. Such missions are conducted further to the invitation of the national authorities or competent electoral bodies and they complement the political monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Assistance in following-up to Congress' recommendations prepared further to observation missions can be provided through a post-electoral dialogue.

Observation missions

“The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, 12-16 October 2017

A Congress delegation headed by Rapporteur Karim Van OVERMEIRE (Belgium, NI) carried out a visit to observe the local elections scheduled for 15 October. The delegation joined efforts with the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission deployed in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” for the local elections. Prior to Election Day, preparatory meetings were held from 12 to 14 October in Skopje. The delegation exchanged views with the Minister of Local Self-Government, the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, the Mayor of Skopje and President of the “Association of the Units of Local Self-Government of the Republic of Macedonia” (ZELS) as well as the President of the State Election Commission (SEC). On Election Day, the Congress delegation deployed six teams involving observers from 12 Council of Europe member States to monitor the vote in some 100 polling stations throughout the country.

On 16 October 2017 at a joint press conference with OSCE/ODIHR in Skopje, preliminary findings were presented. The Head of Congress Delegation, made clear in his statement that the voter turnout of some 60 percent was an important element of the overall positive atmosphere in which the elections took place, despite some incidents during the campaign and also on Election Day. He also referred to issues that should be addressed by the authorities, in particular, the training of members of the Electoral Boards in order to ensure coherent implementation of the rules and further sustainable up-date of the voters' lists to prevent fraudulent manipulations and provide for a closer link between voters and the elected representatives of a specific municipality.

The report will be submitted for adoption at the 34th Session in March 2018.

Georgia, 20-22 October 2017

A Congress delegation composed of the thematic Spokespersons on election observation, Stewart DICKSON (United-Kingdom, ILDG) and Jos WIENEN (Netherlands, EPP/CCE), as well as Congress' Vice-President Barbara TOCE (Italy, SOC), carried out an Electoral Assessment Mission to monitor the local elections held on 21 October. The delegation joined efforts with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Further to the Election Day, Stewart DICKSON presented at a press conference the preliminary post-election conclusions. He confirmed that the electoral procedures were followed carefully by the electoral commissions in the large majority of the 30 polling stations visited by the three teams of the Congress. He also drew the attention of the Georgian authorities to the misuse of public resources during the campaign which seemed to be of specific relevance at the local level. Concerning the Georgian law that currently allows voters who are registered at a permanent or a temporary address to cast a ballot in local elections, the Congress delegation referred to Congress Recommendation 369 (2015) which provides that only voters who are permanently residing in a specific municipality should be enfranchised at the local level.

The report will be submitted for adoption at the 34th Session in March 2018.

Adopted texts

Finland

During its the 33rd Session the Congress adopted Recommendation 408(2017) on the local elections in Finland held on 9 April 2017. The elections took place in the particular context of the current regionalisation reform in the country which entails important changes at the regional but also at the local level.

According to the report presented by Rapporteur Lelia HUNZIKER (Switzerland, SOC), voting was held – with the exception of a some minor issues – in a very professional manner and was characterized by a high level of citizen trust in the electoral processes and the administration. The Congress also welcomes the important degree of transparency, the well-established voter registration and the efforts made by Finnish authorities to strengthen the position of female candidates through gender quotas on candidates' lists.

Consequently, the report draws attention to issues to be considered to achieve further democratic progress that include the promotion of participation of regional political parties and lists of independent candidates, as well as the introduction of mandatory training for all members of the election administration to ensure a consistent level of knowledge about procedures. Finally, the Congress is very keen on seeing that the on-going regional administrative reform will lead to real decentralisation at the regional level.

Yerevan (Armenia)

During its 33rd Session, the Chamber of Local Authorities adopted an Information Report on the elections to the Council of Elders of the City of Yerevan (Armenia) held on 14 May. They were the first local elections organised under the 2016 Electoral Code that established new regulations such as the scanning of voters' fingerprints and the publication of signed voters' lists after E-Day, both measures meant to increase transparency of the electoral process. Luc MARTENS (Belgium, EPP/CCE) presented the report on behalf of Rapporteur Liisa ANSALA (Finland, ILDG) and confirmed the overall orderly manner in which the elections were carried out, with the exception of individual procedural irregularities. At the same time, the report underlines a very low level of political competitiveness and the general lack of public interest in local matters. Also, there are recurring issues of concern for the Congress, in particular the quality of voters' lists which include a large number of voters who are residing - de facto - abroad. In order to strengthen citizens' trust in the electoral process which is characterised by a high level of political apathy, the Congress calls the authorities to pay more attention, in particular, to allegations of vote buying and the misuse of administrative resources.

Post-electoral dialogue

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), 25 and 26 May 2017

A high-level delegation from the Congress carried out this mission in the framework of the post-electoral dialogue, further to the local elections held in the country last October, and the implementation of Congress' mechanisms to assess the situation of local and regional democracy in member States. The delegation included Congress' Vice-President Anders KNAPE (Sweden, EPP.CCE), the Chair of the Monitoring Committee Leen VERBEEK (Netherlands, SOC) and the Rapporteur on the 2 October 2016 local elections in BiH, Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, ILDG). Meetings were scheduled in Sarajevo with the President of Federation of BiH, representatives of the Government of Republika Srpska, and the Principal Deputy of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The delegation also followed-up on Congress' Recommendation 399 (2017), adopted at the 32nd Plenary Session in Strasbourg, with the President of the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina and with the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly.

IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES



The Congress supports local authorities in the performance of their duties in respect of their citizens and it supports them in their search for solutions to the challenges they face, in particular in terms of security, integration, dialogue and participation, respect for fundamental human and social rights, and the inclusion of vulnerable populations.

It initiates reflections and projects on these topics and contributes actively to the work being done in this connection within the Council of Europe and at European level.

A. REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

On 26-27 May 2017, in Nafplio, in the Conference on "Human dignity in times of conflict and crisis - Human rights and humanitarian law" the Congress President highlighted the challenge the refugee crisis represents for local authorities, especially as far as the delivery of services, the respect for human and social rights and the building of inclusive societies is concerned, and urged support from the regional and local levels of government to face the crisis.

In Strasbourg on 1 June 2017, the Congress Secretary General took part in the debate on **“Reception of refugees and migrants in European societies: challenges and solutions”** organised by the Conference of INGOS, the Europa association and the European Public Administration Pole (EPAP). He referred to the work carried out by the Congress, in particular the exchanges with the mayors of towns and cities that had been particularly affected, such as Calais in France, Kos in Greece, Lampedusa in Italy, Kobané in Syria, Sanliurfa in Turkey, and visits to refugee camps in Greece, in Samos and Athens. He noted also that the Congress had adopted a resolution and a recommendation in March 2017, underlining the importance of an early integration approach in compliance with human rights and was currently preparing a report entitled “Unaccompanied refugee children: the role and responsibilities of local and regional authorities”, a report which will be presented to the Congress at its 34th session in March 2018.

At the Seminar on “Integration policies at the local and regional level”, in Brno on 15 June 2017, organised in the framework of the Czech Chairmanship, the President of the Chamber of Regions Gunnar Marit HELGESEN and the Chair of the Current Affairs Committee Gabrielle NEFF took part in the panel discussion on “Integration of people facing exclusion”. The President of the Chamber of Local Authorities Anders KNAPE opened the Seminar. They underlined that Europe needs long-term integration policies to help migrants and to build an inclusive society in order to avoid the already high tensions that fuel political backlash from ultra conservative groups.

On 18 October 2017, during its 33rd Session, the Congress held a debate on the reception of unaccompanied refugee children in European towns introduced by Rapporteur Nawel RAFIK ELMRINI (France, SOC). Three moving testimonies by refugees from Syria, Somalia and Afghanistan, who arrived in Europe as children, confirmed that integration measures had helped them continue their studies and succeed in their respective host countries (Germany, Sweden and France). Congress members commended the personal efforts made by these young people and reiterated the need to increase the number of foster families for migrant children, prevent child trafficking and establish a system to provide each young person with a guardian.

At the International Conference on “Building inclusive communities: integrating migrants, fighting violent extremism, involving citizens” on 20 November 2017 in Rabat (Morocco), Nawel RAFIK-ELMRINI (France, SOC), Vice-President of the Current Affairs Committee and Deputy Mayor of the City of Strasbourg, stated that migrants, as residents, must be able to fully participate in the life of their host community and contribute to its development. She said this contribution was hindered if migrants were excluded either by their legal status or by prejudice and discrimination. She called for specific action at local level to facilitate access to social rights and the labour market, and intercultural policies promoting a positive perception of migrants and a better mutual understanding.

B. FIGHT AGAINST VIOLENT EXTREMISM

On 15 November 2011, the third Summit of Mayors for the Alliance of European Cities against Violent Extremism was organised in Barcelona jointly by the Congress and the European Forum for Urban Security (Efus), in partnership with the City of Barcelona. 60 participants from 18 European countries adopted a declaration stressing the need to implement co-ordinated strategies at local and regional level. Given the threat of growing extremism and the attacks perpetrated against individuals in towns and cities, the participants underlined that “violent extremism covers a lot more than just terrorism and is not primarily a religious issue. They expressed their determination to redouble efforts for prevention (in particular through intercultural and interfaith dialogue), the inclusion of all citizens and enhanced North-South co-operation at local and regional level. This Summit followed on from the Summit in Rotterdam in November 2016 and the Conference of Local Authorities on the Prevention of Radicalisation Leading to Violent Extremism in Aarhus, in November 2015.

C. YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The Council of Europe Congress has long been committed to promoting the active participation of young people in civic life as a means of securing social cohesion and anchoring democratic principles in a society based on respect for human rights. This approach was borne out by the adoption of its European Charter on the participation of young people in municipal and regional life in 1992. The

Congress is cooperating with young people and local and regional authorities to find a way forward towards achieving the meaningful participation of young people.

On 28 April 2017, the Congress organised a seminar on Youth participation in local affairs in Ukraine (see also VI. EXTERNAL COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS)

40 young people, aged 16 to 30, from 40 Council of Europe member States, came for their second time as **youth delegates to the Congress' 33rd Session in Strasbourg from 16 to 19 October 2017**. Since 2014, the Congress has invited active and committed young people from each member state to cooperate and take part in policy-making. This time, they presented the projects they worked on over the last few months and took again active part in the session contributing to the plenary and chamber debates and committee meetings. These projects focused on themes such as promoting the work of the Congress, fostering youth participation, and organising intercultural and interreligious activities. To prepare the projects they used workshops, summer schools, dialogue platforms, project preparation trainings, thematic courses etc.. The 40 projects reached, indirectly, more than 200 000 people and 6 500 young Europeans have participated in the projects. During the 33rd Session, the youth delegates provided two speakers, speaking on behalf of all the youth delegates, to the debate "The fight against corruption". They also contributed their views to the other debates from the floor. The youth delegates stressed that youth participation can be used also as an instrument in such areas as migration and intercultural dialogue. As a clear indication of interest in diversity and inclusion, projects in fourteen countries had elements exclusively dedicated to intercultural and interfaith issues.

D. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The Pact of Cities and Regions to stop sexual abuse against children was signed on 14 June 2017 in Belgrade (Serbia) by the mayors of Belgrade, Surdulica and a representative of the City Council of Kragujevac.

A seminar held in Belgrade on 13 June 2017, organised by the Congress in partnership with the City of Belgrade, gathered national associations of local and regional authorities to discuss ways to share and develop practical initiatives at local and regional level to prevent sexual abuse of children. The seminar also focused on the specific situation of refugee children and minors.

On 31 August 2017 the Pact was signed in Athens (Greece) by the Governor of the Region of Attica, and the Mayor of Nikaia-Rentis, in the presence of Gabriele NEFF (Germany, EPP/CCE), Chair of the Current Affairs Committee of the Congress. Ms NEFF underlined the importance of the initiative to sign this Pact and said she was confident that further municipalities would follow this example, in particular through the close co-operation of the Congress with KEDE, the Union of Greek Municipalities. She stressed the importance of protection of children from sexual violence and abuse in the context of the current refugee crisis. The Pact is a tool developed by the Congress which provides a list of practical actions and policies to be implemented in order to set up child-friendly services, protect children and prevent them being exposed to sexual violence. The signatory cities undertake to develop initiatives in this regard.

The Congress President issued **a statement on 18 November the European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse**. She underlined that cities and regions are at the forefront in the implementation of children's rights-based policies and concrete action to protect children against sexual violence (see also I. POLITICAL AGENDA)

E. GENDER EQUALITY

Speaking at the opening of **the Conference on 'Women and Local Government' in Tunis on 26 September 2017**, the Congress President welcomed the deep changes that have taken place in Tunisia since 2011 and the historic opportunities they open up, particularly with regard to the participation of women. While the Tunisian Constitution of 2014, the electoral law and the draft Local Government Code, currently under consideration by the Assembly of People's Representatives, pay close attention to the place of women, they remain strongly under-represented in public life. Sharing her experience as a local politician, she added that Tunisia was not alone in facing the issues of low

participation of women. She stressed that a profound a profound change in mentalities and cultures, rooted in centuries of tradition, was necessary. This Conference was co-organised by the Congress and the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe, the Tunisian Ministry of Women, Family and Children and the Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment. It was part of the co-operation project implemented by the Congress in Tunisia.

The Congress's Spokesperson on Gender Equality, Inger LINGE (Sweden, EPP/CCE) presented the international legal framework supporting the political participation of women at local level and the Council of Europe's main standards in this area. Having been involved in local political life for some 40 years, she recognised that there had been a distinct improvement in the statistics on women's participation in Europe, especially in the Council of Europe's 47 member States. However, she added that attitudes had not progressed in the same way, that integration and representation of women in local public life will not happen only because of laws and that changes are also needed in public policies on schooling, families and information. Looking ahead to the first local elections in Tunisia, to be held in 2018, she stressed the importance of creating conditions in which women could become involved in politics.

A debate on how to increase the participation of women in political life at regional level was organised in the Chamber of Regions on Thursday 19 October during the 33rd Session (see II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES)

F. INCLUSION OF ROMA AND TRAVELLERS / EUROPEAN ALLIANCE OF CITIES AND REGIONS FOR THE INCLUSION OF ROMA AND TRAVELLERS

The Alliance Task Force, together with the Roma and Travellers Team of the Council of Europe, organised the 10th anniversary edition of the Dosta! Congress Prize for municipalities on 19 October 2017. The Task Force prepared a brochure on the prize including information the last six awards and the winning projects. Representatives of the 2017 winner municipalities, Şişli (Turkey), Volos (Greece) and Gliwice (Poland), took part in the ceremony.

The Alliance was strengthened in November 2017 with **the launching of the Ukrainian “Alliance of cities and regions on development of Roma initiatives” in Kiev.** The meeting was attended by Ukrainian local and regional authorities, representatives of ministries, NGOs and Council of Europe staff. During the meeting, six elected representatives from Ukrainian regions and municipalities signed the “Declaration of mayors and elected local and regional representatives of Council of Europe member states against anti-Gypsyism”. Further signatures from Ukrainian local and regional authorities are expected to follow. Adopted by the Congress in March 2017, the Declaration has since been signed by 74 entities from 30 Council of Europe Member States, of which 19 are regional elected authorities. It is a landmark text that helps local and regional authorities to position themselves explicitly against anti-Gypsyism and work for Roma Inclusion.

At the Sixth International Roma Women Conference on “Women and Political Representation: The Case of Roma and Traveller Women” which took place at the Council of Europe on 6 and 7 November 2017, Xavier CADORET (France, SOC), Congress Vice-President, delivered a speech and signed the “Pledge on political representation of Roma women”. The pledge is a landmark document that allows members of political parties to position themselves clearly for gender equality and the political representation of women from minority groups, in particular Roma and Traveller women, in decision-making bodies. It is an important way forward to promote the participation of women from minority groups at the next European, national, regional and local elections. In his speech he stressing that electoral systems and the effective implementation of quotas are not sufficient. The support by political parties, combatting stereotypes and the political will of local and regional authorities are key factors to improve the situation.

G. WORLD FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY

As in previous years, the Congress actively contributed to the World Forum in Strasbourg on 8-10 November on “Is populism a problem?”. The President of the Chamber of Regions Gunn Marit HELGESEN moderated a Forum Lab on the challenges of ‘hybrid’ democracy, combining

representative democracy with direct citizen participation, and contributed as a discussant in the Lab on local citizen initiatives against corruption. Other Congress members participated in Forum discussions, including Vice-Presidents Anna MAGYAR (Hungary, EPP/CCE) and Clemens LAMMERSKITTEN (Germany, EPP/CCE) as well as Rosaleen O'GRADY (Ireland/ILDG) and Luc MARTENS (Belgium; EPP/CCE) who also co-chaired a networking session on local partnership mechanisms with civil society.

H. EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK (ELDW)

The ELDW celebrated its 10th anniversary in October this year, under the theme "Citizen participation, consultation and commitment: for a thriving local democracy". In its Resolution 423 (2017) on "10 years of the European Local Democracy Week", adopted at the 33rd Session, the Congress decided to establish a Reflection Group tasked with taking the ELDW initiative forward to a new dimension, by building on the best practices of the past decade, which would examine all questions related to the evolution of the Week.

I. OTHERS

On 27-29 September 2017 in Lucca (Italy) Vice-President Barbara TOCE (Italy, SOC) represented the Congress at the 30th Anniversary of the Council of Europe Cultural routes. She highlighted the need to raise awareness of the importance of Europe's cultural heritage and diversity in order to combat hatred, exclusion and xenophobia by promoting intercultural dialogue and protecting this heritage from new threats. She underlined that the Congress had adopted a resolution on the responsibility of local authorities for the protection, preservation, management and maintenance of burial sites, as a part of local history.

On 31 August and 1st September 2017, in Washington, the Secretary General attended the International Forum on fiscal autonomy & co-ordination for effective decentralization. In line with the Forum thematic: "Fiscal autonomy and coordination for effective decentralization", the Secretary General presented recurring issues on local finance and consultation. He outlined in particular the Congress report "Coping with the debt burden: local authorities in financial difficulty" dealing with adequate financial resources for and with local authorities to respond to the economic crisis. He also mentioned, as examples for inter-governmental relations, existing consultation schemes in Albania and Austria which cover both draft legislation and policies and financial aspects.

On 16-17 November 2017, in Barcelona, the President of the Congress took part in the Conference on "Security, Democracy & Cities: Coproducing Urban security policies" organised by the European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS). She underlined that elected representatives must base their action on compliance with human rights and non-discrimination, when developing policies for the safety of their citizens. She said local political leaders must focus their reflection and action on what they can do best: bring people together around an idea, raise awareness, create the conditions for social dialogue, promote citizen initiatives, give greater responsibility to residents in neighbourhoods and generally build capacity to work together locally. The President insisted that there is no hope of achieving a democratic, peaceful society if the rights of some members of that society are not respected. She reaffirmed the necessity to bring all actors of security policies together and ensure that national and local actions in this regard are well coordinated.

V. INSTITUTIONAL CO-OPERATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

A. THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR

The Committee of Ministers

The Congress President and Secretary General hold regular exchanges of views and communications with the Ministers' Deputies. The Congress also contributes actively to the activities of the chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers.

The Congress President held an exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies on 25 October 2017 (see also I. POLITICAL AGENDA).

Rapporteur Group on Democracy

The Bureau held an exchange of views on 15 September in Paris with Ambassador Laima JUREVICIENE, Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the Council of Europe and current Chair of the GR-DEM (see also II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES)

European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG)

Robert GRUMAN (Romania, EPP/CCE) represented the Congress and contributed to the Working Group on the Revision of Committee of Ministers' Recommendation Rec(2001)19 on the participation of citizens in local public life, at its meeting on 7 and 8 September 2017. The revised recommendation will be sent to the Committee of Ministers for adopted after being finalised at the Committee's meeting on 4 and 5 December 2017.

Others

Thematic Spokesperson on Gender Equality Inger LINGE (Sweden, EPP/CCE) gave a speech to the Gender Equality Committee on 6 April 2017.

Directorate General of Democracy

The Congress cooperates closely with the Directorate General of Democracy and its Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform. Together they implement the regional project to strengthen the capacities of local authorities within the countries of Eastern Partnership (2015-2017) and the creation of synergies in existing bilateral projects in Albania, Armenia and Ukraine (See under VII.).

On 26 September 2017, the Congress and the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe, the Tunisian Ministry of Women, Family and Children and the Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment co-organised the Conference on 'Women and Local Government' in Tunis (see also IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES).

B. THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

The Congress holds regular exchanges with the Parliamentary Assembly, in order to increase co-operation at the level of rapporteurs and the respective secretariats as well as in areas of common interest, in particular in the framework of the implementation of Council of Europe Campaigns.

The President of the Congress attends the Parliamentary Sessions and the official lunches offered by the President of PACE. She also holds bilateral meetings with government representatives invited to the PACE Sessions (see also I. POLITICAL AGENDA)

The Congress holds regular exchanges with Luís LEITE RAMOS (Portugal, EPP/CD), PACE General Rapporteur on local and regional authorities who is preparing a report for the Assembly on "The role of national authorities in successful decentralisation processes". Mr Leite Ramos was also an invited speaker at the Governance Committee conference "Successful territorial reform", organised in Eupen on 5 May.

Thematic Spokesperson on Children Johan VAN DEN HOUT (Netherlands, SOC) participated in the 18th meeting of the Lanzarote Committee on 12 May 2017

C. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW

The Congress is working in close co-operation with the Venice Commission, particularly in the field of election observation and the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The Council for Democratic Elections (CED) is a platform for electoral cooperation between the Venice Commission, in its capacity as legal body, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress, as political organs responsible for election observation in their respective areas.

Members of the Congress on the Council for Democratic Elections are currently the Thematic Spokespersons on elections, Jos WIENEN (Netherlands, EPP/CCE) and Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, ILDG).

The Thematic Spokespersons on elections participated in meetings of the Council in March and June 2017 and in December 2017.

The Venice Commission invited Congress Vice-President Anders KNAPE (Sweden, EPP.CCE) and Chair of the Monitoring Committee Leen VERBEEK (Netherlands, SOC) to hold an exchange of views on the co-operation between the Congress and the Venice Commission during its 112th Plenary Session in October 2017.

In April and November 2017, the Congress requested the opinion of the Venice Commission on provisions in the Emergency Decree Law No. 674 of Turkey concerning the exercise of local Democracy in Turkey and the provision of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Moldova that allows for the recall of a Mayor through a local recall referendum.

A delegation from the Congress took part in the regional Conference on “Misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes: a major challenge for democratic elections” held in London on 9-10 November 2017. The Conference was co-organised by the Parliamentary Assembly and the Venice Commission, in cooperation with the Congress. It provided the opportunity to further develop a comprehensive approach for combating misuse of administrative resources and to follow up on the work carried out by the Congress with regard to preventing such malpractice in the context of local and regional elections.

Stewart DICKSON presented the “Checklist for compliance with international standards and best practices preventing misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes at local and regional level”, adopted by the Congress in March 2017. Xavier CADORET (France, SOC), Vice-President of the Congress, intervened on the practical aspects of the misuse of administrative resources, as reported further to election observation missions. Professor Christina BINDER, Congress’ expert on election observation, elaborated on concrete follow-up to observers’ recommendations.

D. THE NORTH-SOUTH CENTRE

The Congress pursued its participation in the quadrilogue governance of the North-South Centre and its commitment to contribute to the Centre’s activities. Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC), Congress Spokesperson on the South-Mediterranean partnership, took part in the Lisbon Forum “Interconnecting People: managing migration, avoiding populism, building inclusive societies and reinforcing North-South dialogue” held in Lisbon on 1-2 June 2017.

The Congress was also represented by its Secretary General in the meetings of the Centre’s Bureau, Executive Committee and North-South Prize jury on 7 November 2017 in Rabat (Morocco). Further synergies will be ensured between the Congress South-Med Partnership Programme and the activities of the Centre in 2018, in particular with regards to the participation of young people and women.

VI. EXTERNAL COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS



A. THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Co-operation between the Congress and the Committee of the Regions of the European Union is ongoing between the Plenary Sessions of the two institutions.

On 10 May 2017, in Brussels, Secretary General Andreas KIEFER participated in the 175th meeting of the European Committee of the Regions Bureau.

On 11-12 May 2017 in Brussels, Congress President Gudrun MOSLER- TÖRSNSTRÖM addressed the Plenary Session of the European Committee of the Regions and held an exchange of views with its members.

On 30 June 2017 in Khiriv, Lviv Oblast, the Secretary General participated in the 3rd Meeting of the European Committee of the Regions' Task Force on Ukraine (see also VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS)

On 12-13 July 2017 in Brussels, the Secretary General presented the political activities and the implementation of the cooperation projects for Ukraine in the 124th Plenary Session of the European Committee of the Regions.

On 5-6 August 2017 in Eupen, the Congress President and the Secretary General met the President and Secretary General of the CoR

On 9 October 2017 in Brussels, Past President and Spokesperson on Promoting Public Ethics and Preventing Corruption at the Local and Regional Levels Herwig VAN STAA (Austria, EPP/CCE) participated in the European Week Cities and Regions - Improving governance and preventing corruption in the EU and Eastern Partnership countries.

B. EUROPEAN ASSOCIATIONS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

The Congress pursues a close cooperation with the main associations and organisations representing territorial authorities in Europe in particular via the participation and input from Congress representatives to a number of events.

On 11 May 2017 in Santiago de Compostela, the Congress President participated to the celebration of the 35th anniversary of the Galician Parliament

22 May 2017 in Minsk, Andris JAUNSLEINIS (Latvia, ILDG) represented the Congress in the 11th Bureau Meeting of the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP).

On 31 May 2017 in Sankt Polten, Lower Austria, Vice-President Yuliya SVITLYCHNA (Ukraine, ILDG) represented the Congress in the General Assembly of European Regions (AER)

On 11 July 2017 in Brussels, the Secretary General met with the Secretaries General of major European Associations for a general overview on activities and cooperation.

On 24 July 2017, in Oviedo, the Congress President participated in the anniversary of the EU and of the Conference of Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE).

On 12 September 2017 in Brussels, Vice-President Sevdia UGREKHELIDZE (Georgia, EPP/CCE) represented the Congress in the Annual meeting of the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP)

On 24 October 2017 in Brussels, Vice-President Xavier CADORET (France, SOC).represented the Congress in the 19th meeting of the Bureau of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM)

On 9 November 2017 in Sevilla, the Secretary General represented the Congress in the General Assembly of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE).

On 8 December 2017, in Tbilisi, the Secretary General addressed the 6th General Assembly of the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) which was established in 2004 under the auspices of the Congress.

VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS



The aim of the Congress' co-operation activities is to assist a number of member States in better meeting the commitments they ratified when becoming a member of the Council of Europe and in implementing the recommendations adopted by the Congress to provide a practical response to the problems identified in the course of European Charter of Local Self-Government monitoring and post-monitoring activities and the observation of local and regional elections.

These activities are carried out by the Congress secretariat within the framework of the action plans of the Council of Europe, in close co-operation and synergy with the other entities within the Organisation.

They are funded by voluntary contributions from member States. Since October 2012, the Congress has implemented activities in the field worth more than 5 000 000 EUR. This amount enabled the Congress to reach out towards more than 1000 mayors, councillors and young local leaders in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

The activities implemented are diverse and adapted to the needs of the beneficiaries: workshops, regional seminars, platforms for exchanges and networking, direct support, political mediation, legal advice. The Congress methodology is its main added-value: thanks to its approach, based on peer exchanges, Congress members and practitioners on the ground are enabled to debate on principles and standards of local governance, and to share innovative practices. As of today, more than 50 Congress members have taken part in peer exchanges in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, in addition to the inputs provided by the members from the respective national delegations of those countries.

The Congress does not promote a "one-size fit all" local self-government model. Its activities are designed to inspire mayors and councillors, to further commit for change in their municipalities, to strengthen transparency and citizen participation in their governance, and to commonly defend their interests vis-à-vis the national authorities, closely with their associations.

The Congress secretariat is developing proposals for new bilateral projects in Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, as well as projects on cross-cutting themes related to local governance. It will continue to deepen its work on the prevention of corruption, specifically through sets of handbooks on "Transparency and citizen participation" being prepared for local authorities in Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and on the right of local authorities to be consulted, with regards to the new guidelines to be adopted in 2018. In addition, the Congress will

introduce a stronger gender perspective in future projects, as well as a focus on human rights at local level, including the rights of minority groups and the fight against radicalisation.

A. ALBANIA

The Congress co-operation activities positively impacted on the country's decentralisation and local government reform specifically through the project "Strengthening local and regional government structures and cooperation between local elected representatives in Albania – Phase II" (2012-2017), implemented from October 2013 to June 2018 by the Council of Europe and funded by the Federal Government of Switzerland.

The Consultative Council of Local and Central Authorities established in January 2017 with the Congress support by means of legislative assistance and political mediation was further supported through its Secretariat. It held three meetings in 2017. Local and regional authorities were consulted on the draft law on local finances, most of which were taken into account in the final text which came into force in May 2017¹ and on the 2018 budget.

A third workshop in the 'Mayors, leaders for change' programme was held in April 2017, with specific focus on further empowering local authorities and strengthening their leadership capacities. The tools and strategies provided will support mayors in their roles as agents of change, and project co-ordinators in their effective design and implementation of municipal projects to improve public services.

B. ARMENIA

The Congress continued implementing its project "Institutional support to the Communities Association of Armenia (CAA)", funded by the Government of Switzerland, which aims to enhance the capacities of the CAA and enable it to become an active stakeholder in the governance system of the country. This project was extended beyond its original deadline of 1 May 2017 until 31 December 2018, based on the overall progress achieved and the positive mid-term review.

In the current phase, the project focuses on establishing a consultation mechanism between the Association and central authorities; ensuring financial sustainability of the Association, including by strengthening its organisational and institutional capacities; as well as building and improving the Association's public image as an important stakeholder in democratic governance, by strengthening its advocacy and communication capacities.

Under the project, the first Forum on Local Democracy in Armenia was organised jointly by the CAA and the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development (MTAD) on 10 November, National Day of Local Self-Government in Armenia. The Forum was opened by Congress President Gudrun MOSLER- TÖRSNSTRÖM and Minister of Territorial Administration and Development Davit LOKYAN. Some 300 participants discussed prospects of decentralisation in Armenia in the context of the on-going territorial-administrative reform.

Further consultations between the Ministry and the CAA were held on 8-9 December, on the occasion of the meeting between the President of Armenia and local elected representatives. Other activities were aimed at strengthening the CAA secretariat and improving its human resources and financial management; establishing thematic committees; creating a new visual identity and website of the Association; building the CAA advocacy capacity to support the Association and its working groups' response to government initiatives such as continued amalgamation of communities, possible introduction of a hotel tax, and draft legislations on local referenda and on intercommunity unions, among others.

¹ Law 68/2017 "on local finances" entered into force on 18 May 2017

C. UKRAINE

The Congress project “Promoting Local Democracy in Ukraine” aims to improve the implementation of democratic principles in Ukraine by enhancing the institutional and leadership capacities of local authorities, and disseminating nation-wide best practices of local democracy. It builds on the post-monitoring roadmap signed between the Congress and the Ukrainian government in May 2015.

The Congress participates in the change which Ukraine has embarked on by creating a network of local actors empowered as drivers of change. The peer work with the contribution and experience from experts and local politicians from Council of Europe member States aims to translate reforms into renewed governance at the local level. Debates within activities revolve around the principles of local self-government, the current reforms in the country, measures to increase the transparency and accountability of local authorities when answering to the needs of their citizens, and various ways to further engage at local level.

In total, the activities implemented within the 2015-2017 Action Plan for Ukraine involved over 150 mayors and 200 local councillors, including heads of local councils, who strengthened their institutional and leadership capacities; and 150 young local leaders who were inspired to get further engaged at local level. Besides the leadership workshops “Local councillors: everyday actors of local democracy” (Odessa and Kharkiv respectively in May and June 2017) and the regional seminars for young local leaders (Dnipro and Odessa in April 2017), three thematic roundtables on “Strengthening local democracy in Ukraine” (June and November 2017) and on “Good governance in metropolitan areas in Ukraine and in Europe” (July 2017) were organised in Kyiv jointly with the Association of Ukrainian Cities and the Delegation of Ukraine to the Congress, with the contribution of the President and the Secretary General of the Congress, offering a platform for exchange and discussion on the on-going reforms.

Facilitating interaction between key players in local and regional democracy in Ukraine has led to the creation of an informal support network, where participants in the same activity continue to share advice and good practice.

A first step in this direction was marked by the Local Democracy Forum, held in Ukraine in July 2017. Mayors, local councillors and young local leaders had the chance to discuss topical issues related to the principles of good local governance, in particular transparency in public decision-making, gender equality, the implementation of new democratic tools and youth participation in local public affairs. The Forum ended with the adoption of a joint declaration in which participants reiterated their commitment and expressed their desire for closer co-operation with the Congress.

Study visits to Strasbourg, organised during the 33rd Congress Session and the World Forum for Democracy, followed thereby enabling the exchange of experiences and the dialogue between Ukrainian mayors, local councillors and young local leaders, and Congress members and stakeholders from other European countries.

To further pursue the development of the local self-government and decentralisation reform in Ukraine, the high-level visit carried out in November 2017, chaired by the President of the Congress Gudrun MOSLER- TÖRNSTRÖM, paved the way for the next monitoring of local and regional democracy in Ukraine, where the commitment to implement the Road map, signed with the Congress in 2015, was re-affirmed by Ukrainian authorities (see also I. POLITICAL AGENDA).

Following a call for proposals, the Congress supported five municipalities in implementation of local initiatives on transparency and citizen participation in Ukraine. The mayors concerned are invited to adopt a more open and participatory mode of governance and to promote a gender perspective in their public policies. The five selected mayors will discuss results and next steps with their peers in a seminar on best practices, to be held in Kyiv in December 2017.

In line with the Congress Resolutions on gender equality and responding to the identified need to develop a country-specific assessment on this topic, the Congress commenced the work on the Study on gender equality in local political life and the gender perspective in local policies in Ukraine. The Study will be presented and disseminated during the aforementioned event.

D. EUROPEAN UNION AND COUNCIL OF EUROPE PARTNERSHIP FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE (PGG) FOR ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA, REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, UKRAINE AND BELARUS (2015-2017)

Since the beginning of 2015, and within the thematic programme V.2 on “Strengthening institutional frameworks for local governance”, the Congress² has worked towards further establishment of a transparent, reliable and efficient local self-government, in line with the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The Congress activities in the region support the on-going process of local government reform and place ethics and transparency at the forefront of its work with local elected representatives as leaders for change. Peer exchanges at country-specific and regional levels enabled sixty local elected representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus to identify and apply effective tools and methodologies to enhance local governance, to develop citizen-oriented policies and work in a more inclusive manner.

From March to September 2017, twelve municipalities from Armenia, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine received, along with financial support, expert guidance tailored to the specific objectives of each local initiative and aimed to ensure sustainability and higher impact of these new policies.

In addition, the representatives of the national associations of local authorities from Armenia, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, together with the experts from these, and from other European countries, took an active role in the work of the Community of Practice on Local Democracy (June and December 2017), which met regularly to discuss ways to improve the quality of local democracy, particularly in the context of each countries’ administrative and territorial reforms.

This platform led to the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG), the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM) and the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC), under the auspices of the Congress, in Kyiv in June 2017. The MoU laid the ground for a reinforced co-operation between the national associations of local and regional authorities in the region towards enhancing good local governance, sharing of experience and good practices between member municipalities, and promoting the culture of dialogue.

Moreover, additional country-specific activities were organised in Georgia and Moldova. Thus, in co-operation with NALAG, and with a view to amending the Code of local self-government, in particular the provisions related to citizen participation, and ultimately the new decentralisation strategy in Georgia, a set of proposals were discussed during a Conference on “Institutionalised citizen participation: an instrument for democratic governance”, in Tbilisi in June 2017, and an experts working group meeting.

In Moldova, a dissemination seminar was organised in September 2017, in Purcari, Stefan-Voda district, where the municipalities of Budesti (municipality of Chisinau), Costesti (Ialoveni district) and Palanca (Stefan Voda district) presented their initiatives to the mayors from the Stefan Voda district and discussed the sustainability of their innovative approaches, in the Moldovan national context.

A regional conference on “Ethics and transparency at local level: strategies and tools” was held on 6-7 December 2017 in Georgia, as a means for peer exchange on collaborative ways to enhance the quality of local democracy in the region. Focusing on the results achieved within the aforementioned local initiatives, the conference also advanced the discussions on the implementation of practical tools for transparent and citizen-oriented governance, with a view to ensuring sustainability and higher impact of local policies.

These tools include “Management of Change: a tool-guide for local and regional authorities” developed based on the experiences within the local initiatives. It aims to help local authorities in addressing identified challenges, recognising the needs, and developing demand-driven and responsive policies. It provides step-by-step guidance towards the successful assessment of the efficiency of local policies and the effective management of change in local communities.

² In partnership with the Directorate General of Democracy and its Centre of Expertise for local government reform.

Other outputs comprise the country-specific “Handbook on transparency and citizen participation”, developed for Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, and discussed during the conference. These documents provide local authorities with practical guidelines on the prevention of corruption, on ethics, transparency and citizen participation, identifying the relevant international standards and outlining the national legislative frameworks, and providing case-law examples and best practices.

The regional conference of 7 December brought together around 100 mayors and local elected representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus. Numerous newly-elected Georgian mayors took part in the event, as well as representatives of national associations of local authorities, civil society organisations and experts.

On the eve of the conference, 5 December 2017, a workshop on ‘Local initiatives: managing and communicating the change’ brought together the mayors and project co-ordinators implementing initiatives on ethical governance to discuss further steps and the sustainability of their efforts.

E. SOUTH MED PARTNERSHIP

Following the adoption of its South-Mediterranean Partnership programme and the visit of two delegations from Morocco and Tunisia during its March Session, activities were developed by the Congress secretariat along the following five main pillars:

- enhancing political dialogue and promoting decentralised co-operation between local and regional authorities on the two sides of the Mediterranean, in the context of the countries’ potential accession to Partner for Local Democracy status of the Congress;
- Legislative assistance and expertise in the Congress’s areas of responsibility;
- Awareness-raising and training for local and regional elected representatives and their staff through the development of specific programmes;
- strengthening capacities of associations of local and regional authorities;
- supporting the development of participatory democracy, with a particular focus on the role of young people, women and civil society.

In Tunisia, focus was put on the support to establishing the legislative framework for local governance. Expert support was provided in the elaboration of the draft Code of Local Authorities, which is currently discussed by the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP). A workshop organised in Tunis on 30 September, with the participation of Congress Vice-President Xavier CADORET (France, SOC), members of the ARP, government officials, and European and Tunisian experts and scholars, examined chapters of the draft Code related to local competences, local finances, municipal property and services, as well as control and supervision, based on the analysis prepared by Congress experts. Members of the Congress Group of Independent Experts, jointly with Tunisian experts, are currently preparing decrees for the implementation of the Code, concerning in particular the status and the organisation of elected councils.

A training-for-trainers course on political conciliation and conflict management was held in Tunis on 16-18 November 2017 in cooperation with the Tunisian Centre of Training and Decentralisation Support (CFAD), in view of potential conflicts that could emerge following local elections scheduled for 25 March 2018. Support was also provided to the National Federation of Tunisian Towns (FNVT) with regard to the revision of its Charter and organisation of project management training for the members of its Secretariat. In addition, a study was prepared by Congress experts on the role of national associations of local authorities in consultation mechanisms in Europe and in the Moroccan and Tunisian contexts.

The role and participation of women in local politics was addressed during an international conference organised jointly with Council of Europe Directorate General of Democracy on 26-27 September 2017 in Tunis, with the participation of Congress President Gudrun MOSLER- TÖRSNSTRÖM (see also IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES)

On this occasion the Congress President also met with the Tunisian Ministers for Local Affairs and the Environment and for Family, Women and Children.

In Morocco, a study was prepared to map the existing training resources in relation to the competences and training needs of Moroccan local and regional elected representatives and their administrations, and exchanges were pursued with the Moroccan Association of Presidents of Communal Councils (AMPCC) and the Association of Regions of Morocco (ARM) to identify training priorities for their Bureau members and secretariats.

An international conference on “Building an inclusive community: integrating migrants, fighting violent extremism, involving citizens”, organised jointly with the City of Rabat on 20-22 November, provided a platform for exchanging knowledge and practical experience on the topics of migrant integration, fight against radicalisation and citizen engagement at local level, with the participation of Congress members and experts, Moroccan local and regional elected representatives, government officials and civil society. At the close of the conference, the First Deputy Mayor of Rabat presented several recommendations for integrating migrants more effectively in his city and announced the creation of a city commission on migrant integration.

Co-operation between the Congress and the Moroccan Parliament was pursued with the organisation of a colloquy in Rabat on 28 November 2017 on “Regionalisation in Morocco: opportunities and challenges of the consolidation of decentralised governance”. The colloquy, opened by President of the Chamber of Representatives and Congress Vice-President Xavier CADORET (France, SOC), brought together Moroccan parliamentarians and government officials, Congress members, representatives of the Moroccan associations of local and regional elected representatives and Moroccan and European experts. The colloquy provided an opportunity to present the principles of decentralisation and local and regional democracy, based on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and exchange views on the experiences of decentralisation reforms in Europe and Morocco.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: 33rd SESSION (18-20 OCTOBER 2017): AGENDA, SUMMARY OF REPORTS, LIST OF RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Agenda:

<https://rm.coe.int/168071c8a1>

II. Summary of reports:

<https://rm.coe.int/168075ab9b>

III. List of Resolutions and Recommendations adopted

Resolutions adopted:

- RESOLUTION 419/ 18 October 2017
Verification of new members' credentials and new appointment procedures/ Rapporteurs: Michail ANGELOPOULOS, Greece (L, EPP/CCE), and Eunice CAMPBELL CLARK, United Kingdom (R, SOC).
- RESOLUTION 420/ 19 October 2017
Local democracy in the Republic of Moldova: clarification of the conditions surrounding the suspension of the Mayor of Chişinău/ Rapporteurs: Gunn Marit HELGESEN, Norway (R, EPP/CCE).
- RESOLUTION 421/ 19 October 2017
Making public procurement transparent at local and regional levels/ Rapporteurs: Amelie TARSCHYS INGRE, Sweden (L, ILDG).
- RESOLUTION 422/ 19 October 2017
A better future for Europe's rural areas / Rapporteurs: Philippe LEUBA, Switzerland (R, ILDG).
- RESOLUTION 423/ 19 October 2017
10 years of the European Local Democracy Week/ Rapporteurs: Congress Spokesperson on the European Local Democracy Week: Gaye DOGANOGLU, Turkey (L, EPP/CCE).
- RESOLUTION 424/ 20 October 2017
Regional and minority languages in Europe today/ Rapporteurs: Lelia HUNZIKER, Switzerland (L, SOC), and Anna MAGYAR, Hungary (R, EPP/CCE).

Recommendations adopted:

- RECOMMENDATION 403/ 18 October 2017
Local and regional democracy in Serbia/ Co-rapporteurs: Lucia KROON, Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE), and Sören SCHUMACHER, Germany (R, SOC).
- RECOMMENDATION 404/ 18 October 2017
Local and regional democracy in Italy/ co-rapporteurs: Jakob WIENEN, Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE), and Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG).
- RECOMMENDATION 405/ 19 October 2017
Making public procurement transparent at local and regional levels/ Rapporteur: Amelie TARSCHYS INGRE, Sweden (L, ILDG).
- RECOMMENDATION 406/ 19 October 2017
A better future for Europe's rural areas/ Rapporteur: Philippe LEUBA, Switzerland (R, ILDG).
- RECOMMENDATION 407/ 20 October 2017
Local and regional democracy in Switzerland/ Co-rapporteurs : Marc COOLS, Belgique (L, GILD) et Dorin CHIRTOACA, République de Moldova (R, PPE/CCE).

- **RECOMMENDATION 408/ 19 October 2017**
Observation of local elections in Finland (9 April 2017)/ rapporteur: Lelia HUNZIKER, Switzerland (L,SOC).
- **RECOMMENDATION 409/ 19 October 2017**
The functioning of the organs of local democracy in a context of linguistic diversity in the communes “with facilities” around Brussels in the Flemish region/ Co-rapporteurs: Henrik HAMMAR, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE), and David ERAY, Switzerland (R, ILDG).
- **RECOMMENDATION 410/ 19 October 2017**
Regional and minority languages in Europe today/ co-rapporteurs: Lelia HUNZIKER, Switzerland (L, SOC), and Anna MAGYAR, Hungary (R, EPP/CCE).

APPENDIX 2: COMMUNICATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONGRESS GUDRUN MOSLER- TÖRNSTRÖM – 18 OCTOBER 2017



Following my election one year ago in October 2016, I underlined, in this very Assembly Chamber, the great importance I attached to the contribution made by the Congress, within the Council of Europe, to the defence of the Organisation's fundamental values – the rule of law, democracy and human rights. I contrasted these values with the various forms of populism, selfishness, intolerance and all the instances of extremist violence which threaten us and which – if we don't provide an appropriate response – risk destabilising the democratic culture of our societies.

I also said on that occasion that I fervently believed in prevention and education as a means of facing up to these threats. And of course, I upheld the idea that strong local and regional authorities with clear powers and appropriate resources could make a significant contribution to addressing these challenges.

In so doing, I was following in the footsteps of my predecessor, Jean-Claude Frécon, who, in March 2016, sounded the alarm, stating that “dark clouds are gathering over the continent”. He was referring, you will recall, to the migration crisis, the lack of solidarity, the conflicts taking place on Europe's doorstep and within Europe itself, the economic and financial crisis and the terrorist attacks in our towns and cities.

Since then the situation has been constantly deteriorating. Worse still, other challenges have emerged to threaten the process of European integration. I am thinking of Brexit, of course, which is of concern not only to the European Union but to all of us, by giving the signal that a halt to the process of peaceful and citizen-centred integration has become a possibility.

The election of a new President in the United States has not improved the situation; indeed it has even heightened insecurity at international level, particularly in its multilateral dimension. Pulling out of the international climate agreement, withdrawing from UNESCO, tearing up the Iranian nuclear agreement cannot but weaken the stability of the international community and of Europe with it.

Dear colleagues, today we are facing a whole range of challenges that will test our ability to move forward together and to take along the citizens.

However, this picture of the dangers threatening us should not make us forget what we owe to the process of European construction, both in its integration dimension and its intergovernmental cooperation aspects. The 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, in March of this year, and the preparation of the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe are opportunities to take stock of the historic advances that have taken place over the past decades: the emergence of a European citizenship, the development of harmonised regulatory and legal spaces, the creation of a single

currency adopted by 19 States, the eradication of the death penalty on the continent, a common approach to protecting all human beings, a specific conception of relations between our central governments and local and regional authorities, subsidiarity and finally peace, 70 years of global peace over the continent after centuries of war.

These are all positive advances which are in sharp contrast with a past shaped by conflict, war and nationalist hatred. We do not want to abandon these advances and each and every one of us, in our own particular roles, can help preserve what has been achieved. The Congress, like other bodies, has a key part to play in this connection.

A few days ago, the former Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt, said in a rather provocative statement, that a Europe of the regions would be “madness” and would mean the end of the European adventure. I would put it another way and say that here in the Congress we are convinced of the need to have strong regions, with enlarged powers, able to guide the economic development of their territory and to protect their cultural identity with due regard for diversity. But I do not believe that the Europe we earnestly hope for, can be built on weak nation States, a disintegrated, fragmented Europe which would be devoid of all influence in the world. What influence would we have vis-à-vis unified powers such as China and the US or regional powers that are stronger than each of our individual States?

Dear colleagues,

In the face of all these challenges, in this major narrative playing out across Europe, our Congress, as the representative of some 200,000 authorities, can help ease tensions. Our message is clear; we know that devolution is essential, that municipal and regional self-government, clearly defined within the limits of each State's legally-established borders, is indispensable. But we do not want to see our nations implode.

In the Europe of values I spoke of at the beginning, whether for the European Union or the Council of Europe, there is no room for selfishness, be it national or regional. There is no place for nationalism, whether national or regional. The Europe to which we in the Congress are committed is a Europe of solidarity, a Europe with a strong local and regional identity.

It is only if all tiers of government make a combined effort to bring about genuine political dialogue that we will be able to avoid undermining everything we have achieved over the last 70 years.

This is the road-map I would like us to follow for the well-being of our citizens, with due regard for the differences and the richness of our diversity.

Thank you.

APPENDIX 3: COMMUNICATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES ANDERS KNAPE – 19 October 2017



Dear colleagues,

I'm delighted to welcome you to the 33rd Session of our Chamber. We have some important work to get through this morning, so I will not speak for long. Let me begin by welcoming our invited speakers.

Today we have several interesting debates: we will be examining two reports on election observations, one in Finland and the other in Armenia. Then we have a report on a fact-finding mission to Belgium and finally a Round-table discussion on the situation in Mostar, which is the debate for which our invited speakers are here.

For the work that we do observing elections, we work closely with other partners, including the OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe Venice Commission.

As I reported to the Bureau, two weeks ago I was in Venice for the autumn plenary of the European Commission for Democracy through Law – the Venice Commission, a Council of Europe expert body on legal and constitutional affairs that has become an important partner for the Congress in recent years - in respect of both our monitoring activities and the observation of local and regional elections.

You may remember, further to the Congress' Fact-finding mission carried out last year in Turkey, we requested a legal Opinion from the Venice Commission with regard to the Turkish Emergency Decree Law No. 674 concerning the exercise of local democracy in the wake of a failed coup attempt in 2016. In a report adopted in March, the Congress determined that this Emergency Decree was incompatible with Turkey's commitments as a party to the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

Now, in its new Opinion, the Venice Commission echoed our criticism and found it particularly worrying that emergency legislation permits central authorities to appoint unelected mayors, vice-mayors and members of local councils, and exercise – without judicial oversight – discretionary control over the functioning of the concerned municipalities. The Venice Commission also recommended to repeal provisions introduced by this Law which are not strictly necessitated by the state of emergency and to provide rules for the reinstatement of suspended or dismissed local representatives in case the terrorism-related charges do not lead to a criminal conviction.

I find this a very good example of co-operation with the Venice Commission and also of the importance of the work of the Congress and the high quality of its reports.

Apart from Turkey, we discussed in Venice also our work in various member states, such as Ukraine and Poland, and issues that we are cooperating on with respect to accompanying the development of democracy in countries such as Tunisia and Morocco. You may be aware that we received an invitation to

observe the local elections in Tunisia in spring next year and that an ambitious programme has been designed by the Congress in the framework of our south-med partnership activities.

But let me get back to our agenda: After our election observation debates, we will discuss the report of a fact-finding mission to Belgium. This is principally a language issue – the rights of a language minority to use their own language. We had related discussions this week in the Bureaux of our two Chambers and in the three Statutory Committees about language issues relating to another country.

Today, as I speak, the Chamber of Regions of the Congress is debating the issue of regional and minority languages. Language is a key issue in our local public life. The report in the other Chamber focuses on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages – a Charter that our Congress played a key role in preparing –which now has its own monitoring mechanisms.

In our debate in this Chamber today we will be considering how language issues can come into play with our own Charter and how they can affect the exercise of local democracy – such as the right of our citizens to participate and the right of our elected members to freely exercise their functions. Here it is our responsibility to safeguard and to defend the rights of our citizens and their own freely elected assemblies to manage their own affairs as much as possible. These issues can get very technical, and, as they say, the devil is often in the detail, but we must keep our sights on the essentials – and pull together on this.

As I said, we are encountering more and more issues related to languages. I don't know why this is – perhaps it's also connected to the pursuit of identity in a more and more globalised world.

I remember the fact-finding mission we did ten years ago in Sur in Turkey, when it was an offence to use the letter 'W', and anybody quoting an internet address with 'www' was making themselves open to prosecution. Interestingly language issues were not mentioned in our last fact-finding mission to Turkey last year. But the town of Sur is again in the news and that makes me wonder whether there is a link between the language issues we were discussing then and the very different issues that we were examining at our last session. That 2007 fact-finding mission was maybe one of the earliest language- related missions.

The Belgian issue that we are discussing today prompted the Congress Bureau to ask the Governance Committee to prepare a report on the use of languages in local and regional government. Our discussions today will feed into that report. The Governance Committee is planning a conference on the issue next year and will begin drafting that report after that conference.

Our last debate today will be about the situation in Mostar. Let me say a few words about this. In May, the Congress organised a Fact-finding mission to this city, where there have been no local elections since 2008. It was important to go there in order to find out more about this deadlock, which makes it hard for Mostar – probably the country's most ethnically diverse city – to further develop.

Why are we concerned? This is a failure of the local democratic process, a failure for the citizens to be able to express their voice and choose their leader.

Sometimes in our monitoring and observation work we come across big problems, glaring problems, crises which should not have happened and which we should be able to do something about. So today we are talking about Mostar. Mostar is not alone in the challenges that it is facing. It is experiencing problems that we find elsewhere in our member states, the tensions of different communities trying to live together. But Mostar stands out for its failure to sort out its electoral law and the subsequent absence – non- participation of Mostar in the local elections in both 2012 and 2016.

I was part of the mission that returned to Mostar this May, in the framework of our post-electoral dialogue. I went there with Leen Verbeek, the Chair of the Monitoring Committee and Stewart

DICKSON, who was rapporteur for the election observation mission that we conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina in October 2016, which he presented to our last plenary session in March. Stewart has kindly agreed to come today to introduce this debate, even though he is from the other Chamber.

In our conclusion of last year's election observation, we said that it was critical to find a suitable and sustainable solution to the deadlock affecting local democracy in Mostar - a deadlock that is depriving

some 100,000 voters of their democratic rights. I hope that today's Round-table debate will contribute to move forward in the right direction, in order to break this stalemate, which has gone on for too long, and we all have a role to play in helping this city return to a normal democratic life. As far as the Congress is concerned, we will keep this high on our political agenda, and the monitoring mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is scheduled for 2018, to assess the implementation of the provisions of the Charter of Local Self-Government will certainly keep the focus on Mostar.

Dear colleagues, I said I would not speak for too long and our time here together is precious. Every day our headlines remind us that democracy is not something that we can take for granted. Here in this Chamber we are in the privileged position of being able to make a real and lasting contribution to solving some of the thornier issues arise in the democratic processes of our towns and cities.

Let us work together to find these solutions. I wish you all a stimulating and fruitful session. Thank you.

APPENDIX 4: COMMUNICATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF REGIONS GUNN MARIT HELGESEN – 19 OCTOBER 2017



Dear colleagues,

This Session is taking place at a critical time, a critical historic period for Europe. The political, economic and social transformations set in motion twenty-five years ago have brought to the fore the question of our vision for the future of this continent and the future of regions in Europe. From Scotland to Catalonia, the regional dimension of our democratic systems has been put to a test, and the way forward depends on our response that we give to this test today.

When more than 40 years ago, in 1975, the Conference of Local Authorities of Europe was expanded to include the regional dimension, and this Chamber of Regions was born, it was in recognition of the importance of regional development and regional identity for realising the European potential. Regions were conceived, and are still seen today, as a bridge between central power and local communities, between national authorities and citizens. Most importantly, regions, with their unique identities, are regarded as the driving force for integrating diversity – ethnic, linguistic, cultural – and realising diversity advantages within our member States.

Diversity and integration have been the guiding theme of this Congress and of this Chamber, and it is fully reflected in the agenda of this Session. From the outset, we have been working to make live the motto of Europe – United in Diversity – in which the first word is equally important to the last one. Over decades, this Chamber has brought to life proposals for a European Charter of Regional Democracy and then the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, adopted by the Council of Europe in 2009. In all these proposals, we have been committed to the principle of national unity as the foundation for devolution of power and regional autonomy – and this commitment remains true today, especially today.

Make no mistake – decentralisation and regional devolution have been a landmark feature of Europe democracy. They remain an essential component of a balanced distribution of powers and therefore greater democratic stability and security. These are exactly the objectives of the process of regionalisation – greater stability and more democracy.

It must be possible, and it is possible, to express our unique regional identities and defend regional interest within the national framework of the State. It is the primary goal of regionalisation and regional autonomy – to allow regions to realise their potential within States. Over the past forty years, we have seen plenty of good examples to prove us right, but we have also seen, and are still witnessing, the bad ones. We must look at what is missing or lacking in this process.

We must take a closer look at the importance of dialogue, the importance of consultation mechanisms and processes, between national and regional authorities – and always bear in mind that the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, including the consultation requirement, are equally applicable to regions.

We must take a closer look at involving citizens, in all their diversity, in decision making at regional level – at engaging them in regional community building through their greater participation, participation of women, of minorities, of young people. A loss of trust in politicians by our citizens and

their feeling of exclusion from democratic processes are seen today as a major reason for rising populism and nationalism, leading down the road to fragmentation of our continent into self-isolated exclaves. Bringing citizens back on board, having them work side by side with authorities, making them feel empowered to make decisions on their future is the best antidote.

In this process, we must take a closer look at the role of associations representing regions at the European scale, the role of regional organisations, some of which are participating in our Session today. Their advocacy work as defenders of the interests of regional authorities, their work to promote regional representation in the governance systems is of utmost importance for shaping the future of regions both within member States and within Europe.

Finally, as we reflect on the future of Europe, we must take a closer look at our long-proposed system of “multi-level governance” which would balance multi-polar distribution of powers between European, national, regional and local levels – and the place and competences of regions within this system. This year’s White Paper on the future of Europe, produced by the European Commission, offers five possible scenarios – all of which dealing with relations between member States, and none specifying the role of regions or local communities. A notion of “multi-level governance” is regrettably missing from this reflection.

It is time that we, regions of Europe, and our associations, make our contribution to this ongoing debate, and I see the debates at our Session today as steps in this direction.

Dear colleagues,

Our motto, “Strong Regions in Strong States”, can also be interpreted as “Stronger Regions Mean Stronger States”. Our focus today must be on building what is making us stronger – involving citizens, strengthening protection of their human rights, supporting integration and fostering inclusive regional communities – these are the most effective responses to the current threats of populism and violent extremism. Regions have a crucial role to play in achieving these objectives, by taking measures sometimes ahead of national governments. Let us not fear innovation – our proximity to citizens, through dialogue and cooperation with local authorities, enables regions to act as catalysts for exploring new methods and innovative approaches, and supporting local communities in their initiatives. In this regard, involving regions in such pan-European events as the Local Democracy Week, which will be debated in the Congress Session this week, and increasing regional participation in such activities can give us food for thought.

Of course, regions are not acting in isolation, neither within their member States nor within Europe. Decentralised cooperation allows us to reach our counterparts across the continent and beyond – because addressing problems that have become global in nature requires involvement of our neighbours as well. In this regard, the current Congress cooperation activities to advance regionalisation in Morocco and to build local and regional governance in Tunisia provide an excellent opportunity for our regions to share experiences and good practices with regional authorities on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, through the South-Med Partnership of the Congress. Inasmuch as the Council of Europe Action Plans for member States give us a platform for the regional input to implementing Congress recommendations in European countries.

Dear colleagues,

In conclusion, I would like to stress once again the role of regions as a bridge, as a connecting point that brings nations together and serves as a channel of dialogue between national, regional and local authorities and citizens – and as a channel of cooperation in nation building. At the same time, regional specifics and identities gives our regions a special role for integrating the diversity aspect into these nation building efforts. This unique position must define the role of regions in shaping the future

Europe, and this Chamber must make its contribution to supporting and defending this role, defending our regional identities and interests in the national framework of States.

I am confident that the debates today will bring a valuable input to this process, and strongly hope for your active participation.

Thank you, and let us build bridges to the future Europe!

APPENDIX 5: BARCELONA DECLARATION - ALLIANCE OF EUROPEAN CITIES AGAINST VIOLENT EXTREMISM – SUMMIT OF MAYORS– 15 NOVEMBER 2017



Generalitat
de Catalunya



Alliance of European Cities against Violent Extremism Summit of Mayors

15 November 2017 – City Hall of Barcelona, Spain

Barcelona Declaration

We, mayors and representatives of cities and regions from 18 European countries, meeting in Barcelona, Spain, at the initiative of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the European Forum for Urban Security and the City of Barcelona, in co-operation with the Generalitat of Catalonia,

Building on our experiences with the Alliance of European cities against violent extremism in our meetings in Aarhus (Denmark) in 2015 and in Rotterdam (Netherlands) in 2016;

Determined to tackle all forms of violent extremism, while reaffirming and reasserting the basic principles of democracy: dialogue, protection of fundamental rights, respect for the opinions of others and rejection of all forms of violence;

Reaffirming our resolve to strengthen our communities, working with civil society, to foster inclusive cities and to promote narratives that reject violence and uphold democratic values;

- **Note that it is now time to take stock:** the attacks on our citizens in our cities are continuing and there is no apparent sign that they will diminish. The threat of violent extremism is a phenomenon that demand from local authorities long-term and transversal approaches that minimise the risks to our citizens by creating a culture of diversity without violence;

- **Recognise the need to broaden the scope of local authority strategies to counter all forms of extremism:** violent extremism is much broader than terrorism, and it is not primarily a religious matter. It is fundamentally an acceptance of violence as means and a rejection of the democratic values and roots upon which rely the foundation of our societies;

- **Commit to making our cities safe and inclusive environments** for all our residents, in all neighbourhoods, at all times, free from all forms of violence.

- **Redouble our efforts at prevention,** building resilient societies that cherish the values of diversity and living together and oppose to violence, making more inclusive societies, promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and combatting all forms of marginalisation;

- **Develop the North-South dimension of dialogue** with our neighbouring countries and territories in combating violent extremism, recognising that we share the same concerns and that cooperation with our neighbouring countries is part of the solution. Inter-city co-operation is an important vector that needs to be developed as we have much to learn from each other and much to gain by working more closely together;

- **Reaffirm our resolve to bring all actors together,** from all levels of government and from civil society to make our cities safe for all citizens regardless of their age, social, cultural or confessional backgrounds.

As part of its monitoring of local and regional democracy in Europe, the Congress maintains a regular dialogue with member states of the Council of Europe. The Committee of Ministers, which includes the 47 Foreign Ministers of these states, the Conference of Ministers responsible for local and regional authorities, as well as its Steering Committees – like the one on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) – are partners in this regard.

Several times a year, the President and the Secretary General of the Congress provide the representatives of the 47 member states in the Committee of Ministers with a record of its activities and hold an exchange of views.



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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an institution of the Council of Europe, responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its 47 member states. Composed of two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions – and three committees, it brings together 648 elected officials representing more than 200 000 local and regional authorities.

The Congress

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