

CG36(2019)25

26 April 2019

Activity Report of the Congress

(Mid-October 2018 – mid-April 2019)

Communication by the Secretary General of the Congress at the 1345th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies

2 May 2019

Layout: Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Print: Council of Europe

Edition: April 2019

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Communication by Andreas KIEFER, Secretary General of the Congress

This activity report is an overview of the work of the Congress since the last communication to the Committee of Ministers on 17 October 2018. It covers two sessions and key issues of the Congress' work since then.

Institutional cooperation

During this period, the Congress continued its institutional dialogue with the Parliamentary Assembly (see activity report V. Institutional cooperation within the Council of Europe). The Congress Bureau has welcomed the PACE proposal for closer co-operation (see Resolution 2277 (2019) on the Role and mission of the Parliamentary Assembly: main challenges for the future which invites the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly to “prepare, in coordination with the Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, a memorandum on possible periodical consultations and permanent co-operation between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and their structures (§ 14 of the Resolution)”). The Bureau of the Congress has started to discuss this initiative, including a joint and complementary action to the Council of Europe contribution to the United Nations' SDGs.

The Congress also continued its institutional dialogue with member states, including exchanges of views with ministers and state secretaries in sessions and bilaterally.

The Congress is celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2019. By one of only five statutory resolutions, the 1993 Vienna Summit established the Congress as an organ of the Council of Europe. The first session of the new Congress was held on 30 May – 2 June 1994.

With the Congress, the Council of Europe disposes of a third political body to contribute to the aims of the Organisation and to reach out to the citizens and the local authorities. The Congress – with its five spheres of action as

- a consultative organ,
- a monitoring body,
- a forum for exchange a co-operation of local and regional politicians,
- an operational structure implementing Council of Europe Action Plans on the ground
- an important distribution channel for Council of Europe legal instruments and policies as well as recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to member states where local and regional authorities are concerned

Is a valuable tool for the Organisation in achieving its objectives. The Congress members are aware of the responsibility they have as members of an organ of the Council of Europe and are proud to be part of the institutional setup of the Organisation as local and regional authorities are part of the constitutional setup of the member states.

Details of the co-operation activities, the interaction with the inter-governmental sector, the work on the ground in the framework of Council of Europe Action Plans, the work programmes of the committees – which were reproduced in detail in the written communication in October – or with the Congress partner in the EU, the Committee of the Regions, can be found in this activity report.

The Congress sessions

The sessions are somewhat like “open doors” events for ambassadors and the public, where results are presented, and reports delivered as well as their follow-up discussed.

The overall themes of the two sessions were reflected in the debates and reports: for the 35th session in November 2018 - Integrity and ethical behaviour of local and regional representatives – and for the 36th session in April 2019 - Mayors safeguarding democracy.

On 6 November 2018, during the 35th session, Anders Knape was elected as the new Congress President for a 2-year mandate. He held his first exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies on 28 November 2018 and outlined his priorities.

- Enhancing local democracy and trust in democratic institutions at local and regional level as basis for democratic security at national level in member states → the Congress concretely contributes to implementing Art 1 of the Council of Europe Statute: to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage (referred to in the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by all 47 member states).
- Preventing and fighting corruption, as was identified by the Organisation as a priority and outlined in the annual report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

The different reports and debates of the sessions are described in this report. I would like to highlight the Status for partner for local democracy granted to Morocco, which allowed the Congress to welcome a delegation at its April Session. Another highlight is the political dialogue developed with Belarus and the organisation of two conferences on decentralisation and on the European Charter of Local Self-Government in October and end of April in Minsk.

Among the adopted reports in April 2019, the following two are of particular importance for the Congress:

- REC 430 (2019) on the budget and resources of the Congress for the next biennium and
- REC 429 (2019) on the Congress' contribution to the reflection on the future of the Council of Europe

The Congress' budget and the current working conditions

The April 2019 Session was the first under the new language regime – interpretation provided by the Congress only in the two official languages French and English and no longer in the working languages German, Russian and Italian - imposed by the financial situation. The decision had to be taken in order to maintain the institutional functioning and the work of the committees and the session. It created difficulties and problems for several members and national delegations.

Concerning the budget and resources needed for 2020 and 2021, the Congress refers in its recommendation to the reforms already undertaken, to the savings made in the last years and the limitation of its statutory work following the cuts both in staff and operations.

One consequence is the extension of the monitoring cycle from originally four to five years to now up to seven years. This does not allow to respond to the wishes of member states, who often wait to use the Congress recommendations as guiding elements for their decentralisation reforms.

Invitations to some local election observations could not be accepted or delegations had to be reduced in number. I am pleased, however, to thank the authorities of Turkey and Albania for having invited the Congress to observe the local elections there and the Congress was able to respond positively to these invitations.

In addition, the requests of inter-governmental bodies for Congress input had to be reduced due to a lack of resources. This is an issue which should be resumed in order to enable the Congress to fully deliver and to contribute to the intergovernmental work of the Organisation. And finally, in the outreach dimension, activities like the Alliance of Cities and regions for Roma inclusion or the annual summits of mayors against radicalisation cannot be performed anymore and both reputation of the Organisation, know-how, experienced staff and external contacts are lost. The list can be continued, to our regrets.

The Congress, in the light of this, and with the commitment to meaningfully contribute and successfully deliver the tasks conferred to it by the heads of state and government on the Vienna summit in 1993, asks the Committee of Ministers

- To allocate a budget to the Congress which is commensurate with the institutional functioning as well as with its statutory, monitoring, thematic and advisory tasks;
- To reverse the downward trend of the Congress' share from almost 3 % to now 2,53 % and to gradually return towards a share of 3 %, without which the Congress can simply not deliver what is expected of it
- To consider how to best focus and concentrate all Council of Europe-activities targeting local and regional authorities and their political representatives and build on the competences and capacities of the Congress and its secretariat, and

- To invite the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to include in the draft programme and budget for 2020/2021 a budget envelope for the Congress which recognizes and enables the Congress to contribute to the local and regional dimension of the objectives and activities of the Organisation.

The figures mentioned, and the full text of the recommendation are available in appendix 4 of this report.

Contribution to the Helsinki Ministerial meeting

The Congress and its members are at the forefront of societal challenges and changes. They live with the people, are close and respond – together with the councillors and the administrations under their authority – to their needs. They are part of the distribution chain of the principles, values, legal instruments, policies and campaigns of the Council of Europe. There is a local and regional dimension in the Council of Europe values.

As part of the “Team Council of Europe” and following the invitation in October 2018 by the Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers Ms. Pejcinovic-Buric, Congress members discussed and voted a contribution for the Helsinki Ministerial and to the Ministers representing their member states. In his message sent to all Ministers’ Deputies on 17 April 2019, Congress President Anders Knapé asked all Ambassadors, to “firstly, draw the attention of their Minister for Foreign Affairs to this text and, secondly, to ensure that the Congress’ contribution, and in more general terms, the local dimension of democracy, is fully reflected and taken into account in the political conclusions of the ministers in Helsinki. As it highlights in its Recommendation 429, the Congress is more than ready, in full knowledge of the political difficulties currently being experienced by the Council of Europe, not only to contribute to achieving the objectives of the Organisation, but to implementing the decisions of the Helsinki Ministerial Session in its sphere.”

When reading the Congress contribution for Helsinki, one can notice that it is not the plea to mention the Congress in the Helsinki conclusions for the sake of an institutional logic. The contribution is rather an analysis of the situation and the commitment to support national governments to reconnect citizens and to restore confidence in democratic processes and institutions. This is exactly what the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General have addressed as challenges and threats to the European model of society with democratic, judicial and institutional checks and balances, with division of power and the respect of human rights and the rule of law. And this analysis needs a concrete follow-up.

The interdependence of the three pillars of the Council of Europe – democracy, human rights and the rule of law - can be seen best at the local level, where the citizen is in the centre of the attention.

The key aspects of the Congress contribution are the following:

7. *A number of our intellectual reference points are becoming less and less certain, leading to social anxiety and an evolution in our political perceptions, reflected more specifically in a crisis of representation that manifests itself in many European countries, in particular by the rise of anti-liberal tendencies, the return of authoritarian temptations, the resurgence of nationalism along with territorial aspirations for secession, and the emergence of a “clash” society in which confrontation is the norm, with new forms of individual and collective violence.*

8. *For years prior to these developments, there has been a growing loss of public confidence in elections and in democratic institutions, which has resulted in increasingly worrying abstention rates and a rising number of votes for extreme parties, particularly the extreme right, and a widespread crisis of confidence in the media that has shaken our very conception of factual truth.”*

In its contribution for the Helsinki ministerial meeting, the Congress points out the shared responsibility to remedy the situation:

12. *How can we restore the political link where it has been damaged? How can we safeguard democracy where it is being threatened? How can we repair the social fabric where it has come apart? This is the challenge of the transformations that are unfolding. All levels of governance are concerned by these questions:*

- *the Council of Europe, founded on the three pillars of the rule of law, democracy and human rights, which, together with other international organisations, cannot remain indifferent;*
- *the central governments of the member States that have to deal with these questions on a daily basis’, and*
- *local and regional authorities, who are in permanent contact with the citizens and at the frontline of addressing citizens’ concerns.*

All levels clearly share these new challenges that we must meet by including in our political agenda the key question: "How to live together today?"

13. We, the members of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, are convinced that while responding to these challenges is a task falling primarily to central governments and multilateral organisations such as the Council of Europe, the response is also to be found at community level.

14. We also firmly believe that while this transformation may appear to be a systemic crisis having multiple dimensions, it is not a crisis that has no solution. With the right political will, the commitment of public institutions and the active involvement of societies and citizens, these negative changes can be reversed. A crisis is not the end, it represents a critical time in any process of transition to a new paradigm, and an opportunity for improvement which compels us to think about alternatives. The reflection about the future of the Council of Europe should be approached in this spirit.

27. As we mark the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe this year, we, the members of the Congress, are convinced that the future of this Organisation lies in strengthening further its role in ensuring democratic stability on our continent and protection of European citizens, and in developing its role as the pan-European mechanism for intergovernmental, inter-parliamentary and territorial co-operation. We believe that the challenges facing our societies today must be addressed by promoting and using the territorial dimension of European democracy based on a new socio-territorial pact."

In these times, where we celebrate the 70th year of the Council of Europe and the 25th year of the Congress, these are the main messages of the Congress. Of a Congress, whose members and secretariat are committed to the Council of Europe, its values and who are committed to reach out and to deliver for the sake of the citizens of Europe.

I. POLITICAL AGENDA

Election of Anders KNAPE as President of the Congress (6 November 2018)

Congress members have elected Anders KNAPE (Sweden, EPP/CCE) President of the Congress for a two-year term. In his first communication as President, Anders KNAPE described the Congress as a political body tasked with protecting local democracy, not representing governments but rather citizens in towns and regions and emphasised the major role played by the Congress in promoting and safeguarding local and regional democracy. Mr KNAPE stressed the need to provide the Congress with resources to enable it to perform its tasks and maintain the quality of its work in support of local democracy. He explained that the Congress was the only organisation responsible for monitoring implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and that this monitoring work, along with the post-monitoring and election observation activities, was essential. He said the Congress was an important part of the Council of Europe and of the system of safeguarding democracy in Europe.

Among the key themes of his priorities, he mentioned youth participation in political life, the fight against corruption, strengthening gender equality and the pressure and threats facing local and regional elected representatives.

Statement by the President of the Congress on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November 2018)

President KNAPE stressed the need for specific actions at territorial level involving all stakeholders and the importance of an adequate legal framework. He underlined that the Congress has been working for several years to promote women's rights. Most recently, it sponsored two "lab" sessions as part of its contribution to the World Forum for Democracy, whose 2018 edition focused on women's public, political and economic participation and on combating violence against women.

During the last decade, the Congress adopted a recommendation and resolution on combating domestic violence, called for the development of strategies and measures at the local level (2009) and actively participated in the Council of Europe campaign "Stop domestic violence against women" (2006-2008). It launched, in this context, a poster campaign in the streets and subways of many European cities under the slogan "Cities and regions take a stand to fight violence against women". Congress' work to promote women's rights also focuses on women's political participation and representation (2016), the gender perspective in budgetary processes (2016) and the fight against the feminisation of poverty (2015).

Meeting with the Croatian Minister of Public Administration (30 November 2018)

Progress in decentralisation and local government reform in Croatia was discussed during a visit by the Minister of Public Administration of the Republic of Croatia, Lovro KUSCEVIC, to the Congress Secretary General. The Minister emphasised the role of digitisation in the modernisation of local government in Croatia and in the fight against corruption. Further topics of the exchange included the protection of human rights and minorities in Croatia, the challenges of the refugee crisis for the municipalities and regions and migration movements in Europe.

Meeting of the Congress President with the President of Greece (6 December 2018)

During his meeting in Athens with the President of the Hellenic Republic, Prokopis PAVLOPOULOS, the President of the Congress described the priorities of his mandate and underlined the Congress' support for cities and regions in dealing with the challenges of migration and fighting corruption. He stressed that the Congress can implement Council of Europe principles and conventions in concrete terms at the local level, in addition to defending the quality of democracy and citizen participation in all the member states of the Council of Europe. President PAVLOPOULOS encouraged the Congress to continue the work to strengthen local and regional democracy across Europe.

The Vice-President Michalis ANGELOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CCE) and members of the Congress delegation also informed the President of the Hellenic Republic about the preparations for the Congress' contribution to the activities and priorities of the Greek Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2020.

Statement by the Congress President on the International Migrants Day (18 December 2018)

The Congress President declared that the issue of migration is more than ever at the heart of public policies, particularly at local and regional level. Local and regional authorities have a key role in organising the reception of migrants and their integration. He stressed that the Congress has been working in this perspective for several years, with a particular focus on co-operation at all levels of governance as early integration is a crucial step to facilitate the long-term inclusion of migrants and refugees. About border regions, to which the Congress pays particular attention, he said it was necessary to clarify the legal framework to better distribute competences between the different levels of governance.

Statements by the Congress after the death of the Mayor of Gdańsk (14 January 2019)

President KNAPE conveyed on behalf of the Congress his sincere condolences to the family and to the citizens of Gdańsk, after Mayor Paweł ADAMOWICZ was stabbed to death at a charity concert. He stressed that the assassination of a mayor who was so close to his fellow citizens, devoted to his city and to his country is tragic. He reaffirmed the Congress' support for all local and regional elected representatives who exercise their mandates in the service of their communities and citizens.

Xavier CADORET, President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, addressed a letter to the Polish delegation and highlighted the mayor's commitment to its city. He also represented the Congress and its President at the funeral on Saturday 19 January 2019 in Gdańsk.

Piero FASSINO, President of the socialist group also published a statement underlining that mayor Paweł ADAMOWICZ defended freedom, democracy and law in Poland. He stated it was the responsibility of every democratic conscience to reject any form of inaction or recourse to violence.

Meeting of the Congress President with the Prime Minister of Spain (7 February 2019)

During their bilateral meeting, the President of the Congress and the Prime Minister of Spain, Pedro SANCHEZ discussed the role of local and regional authorities in Europe and the challenges they are facing as well as the work of the Congress in the field of monitoring and election observation. President KNAPE underlined that the Congress was the only institution that monitored the situation of local democracy in all 47 Council of Europe member States and the only institution to observe local and regional elections. He highlighted that, despite the current budgetary difficulties, the Congress needed a secured budget if it was to continue delivering the expected results. The President also welcomed the election of the mayor of Aranjuez, Cristina MORENO MORENO as Vice-President of the Congress last November and supported the involvement of the Spanish delegation in the Congress work.

Meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine (27 February 2019)

During their meeting, the Secretary General of the Congress and the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine, Ivanna KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE discussed the decentralisation reforms currently under way in Ukraine and the co-operation with the Congress in this area. The Deputy Prime Minister expressed her gratitude for the Congress's support in implementing the reform and emphasised how important it was to make this an irreversible process. The Secretary General reaffirmed the Congress's commitment to developing local and regional democracy in Ukraine through the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and co-operation activities on the ground. Co-operation on the ground with Ukraine forms part of the « Promoting Local Democracy in Ukraine » project, run by the Congress through the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021 (see VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS).

Participation of the President of the Chamber of Regions in the visit of the Crown Prince of Norway to the Council of Europe (18 March 2019)

On the occasion of an official visit of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Norway to the European Court of Human Rights the President of the Chamber of Regions, Gunn Marit HELGESEN had an opportunity to inform Crown Prince HAAKON about the grassroots work of the Congress for democracy and human rights.

Mrs HELGESEN referred to the Crown Prince's role as United Nations Development Programme Goodwill Ambassador for the Sustainable Development Goals and underlined the concrete contribution

of the Congress to the SDGs 5 – Gender equality, 11 Sustainable cities and communities, and 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions.

Visit of the President of Upper Austria to the Congress (22 March 2019)

A delegation from Upper Austria, headed by the President (Landeshauptmann) Thomas STELZER, visited the Council of Europe and met the Secretary General of the Congress. The Secretary General informed Mr STELZER of the follow-up given to the latest report of the Congress about local democracy in Austria, as well as the next follow-up visit, planned for 2020. They also discussed the role of the regions in the implementation of human rights. In this regard, the Secretary General presented the first volume of the Congress Human Rights Manual.

Call by the President of the Congress to respect the voter's decision in the 31 March local elections in Turkey (12 April 2019)

Reacting to reports from Turkey about elected representatives in the south-east of the country not having been appointed mayors despite their victory in the 31 March local elections, Anders KNAPE stressed the importance of the respect for the voter's decision. He referred to the Congress Bureau statement after the observation of the local elections and recalled that the democratic choices and decisions of the people, who are the sovereign in any Council of Europe state, have to be fully respected and the implementation of the will of the voter has absolute priority in democratic systems. (see APPENDIX 6)

Congress co-operation with Belarus

Gomel, 25-26 October 2018

At the invitation of the Council of the Republic of Belarus, Congress President Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM participated in the Belarus-Ukraine Forum of Regions, on 25-26 October 2018 in Gomel, devoted to cross-border co-operation between two countries. The Forum was also addressed by President of Belarus Alexander LUKASHENKO and President of Ukraine Petro POROSHENKO.

Minsk, 22 November 2018

In the context of developing relations between Belarus and the Congress, a working meeting was held at the headquarters of the Council of the Republic of Belarus with the President of the Council of the Republic, Mikhail MYASNIKOVICH, and the Congress Director. They discussed among others co-operation activities that could be included in the future Council of Europe Action Plan. Among the projects under discussion are the creation of an association of local authorities and the launch of an ambitious decentralisation process in Belarus. In addition, the Director of the Congress and the President of the Council of the Republic referred to a joint conference between the Presidents of the Congress and the Belarusian authorities that could be held in the first half of 2019.

Minsk, 29-30 April 2019

High level meetings and round table on local self-government in Belarus

On 29 April 2019 in Minsk, Congress President Anders KNAPE will meet President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander LUKASHENKO and several other representatives of the Belarusian authorities.

On 29 and 30 April, President KNAPE and First Vice-President Gunn Marit HELGESEN will participate in a meeting of the Council on Coordination of Local Self-Government Bodies and a round table discussion on improving local self-government legislation in Belarus and the functioning of associations of local and regional authorities, with representatives of Belarusian regional associations and from the Slovenian, Georgian, Polish and Ukrainian national associations.

II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES

A. THE BUREAU

Strasbourg, 5 and 8 November 2018

On 5 November, the Bureau approved the final version of the draft agenda of the 35th Session. On the agenda were also the recent developments regarding the situation of Nurhayat ALTUN, member of the Turkish delegation to the Congress, who has been in detention since 16 November 2016 and who was still awaiting trial; the President's report on her participation in conferences in Gomel and Minsk on 25 and 26 October 2018, and her meetings with Alexander LUKASHENKO and Oleg KRAVCHENKO, respectively President of Belarus and First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus, as well as with Petro POROSHENKO, President of Ukraine, present on the spot; the invitation to observe the local elections of 18 November 2018 in Slovenia and the political situation in the Council of Europe.

On 8 November, the Bureau was informed by the Secretary General of the Congress of the adoption, scheduled for the 129th Session of the Committee of Ministers in Helsinki, on 16/17 May 2019, of a declaration on the future of the Council of Europe. It instructed the presidents of the two chambers to prepare the Congress' contribution to this declaration in the form of a report to be adopted by the Congress at its April 2019 Session. The Bureau also agreed to the proposal to hold the next meeting of the Congress/Committee of the Regions High Level Group in Paris on 29 January 2019 and celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Congress and the CoR during the CoR session on 27 June 2019 in Brussels.

Paris, 29 January 2019

The Congress Bureau met in Paris on 29 January 2019. In particular, members approved the agenda for the 36th Session of the Congress under the theme " Mayors safeguarding democracy".

Members approved the list of Bureau rapporteurs, Congress representatives and thematic spokespersons. They also discussed the Congress' inter-institutional relations, in particular with the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, as well as with the European Committee of the Regions of the European Union.

Other items on the agenda included the preparation of the Congress' contribution to the Helsinki process on the prospects for the Council of Europe, co-operation with Belarus and the Congress' budget for the next 2020-2021 biennium.

Helsinki, 1 March 2019

The Bureau met in Helsinki at the invitation of the Finnish Association of Local Authorities, in the framework of the Finnish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. The Bureau participants were welcomed by the President of the Association Sirpa PAATERO and then held an exchange of views with Martti HETEMÄKI, Permanent State Secretary at the Ministry of Finance of Finland. The Secretary of State informed the Bureau that Finland was in the process of carrying out a major reform of the country's governance, which provides for the creation of an additional level of government in the form of 18 counties. The Secretary of State stressed that this was "a revolutionary reform, unprecedented for more than two hundred years" and underlined that it was currently under discussion in Parliament and was the subject of many debates and consultations. The Congress President welcomed the fact that local and regional democracy is at the heart of the Finnish government's concerns.

Among the items on the agenda were also the draft recommendation on the Congress' contribution to the reflection on the future of the Council of Europe (Helsinki process) as well as the draft budget for the next biennium 2020-2021 and the timetable relating to the priorities of the Congress for the period 2021-2024.

The Bureau also discussed the agenda of the 36th Session, the terms of reference of Congress thematic spokespersons, and examined the invitations addressed to the Congress by the authorities of Turkey and Albania to observe the local elections in Turkey on 31 March and Albania on 30 June 2019.

Strasbourg, 2 and 4 April 2019

The Bureau, meeting on 1 April, on the eve of the session in Strasbourg, approved the final version of the draft agenda of the 36th Congress Session and examined several documents outlining the situation of the Congress budget, its evolution since 2012 and possible future developments, including an overview of the Secretary General's contingency plan.

In addition to approving changes in the national delegations, members took note of a document outlining the Congress' co-operation activities in member States and neighbouring regions. Other items on the meeting agenda included the situation of Nurhayat ALTUN, who was condemned to 10 years in prison on 20 March 2019 and an update on the revision of the Congress' Charter, currently under examination by the Committee of Ministers' Rapporteur Group on Democracy.

At its meeting on 4 April the Bureau discussed the Ministerial meeting to be held in Helsinki (16-17 May) and the importance of raising awareness within the ministries of each country about the Congress' contribution to the summit, its ideas on the future of the Council of Europe and the essential role of local and regional democracy in general. Members were informed of the theme for the European Local Democracy Week for 2019-2020: "Local democracy: building trust"

Following an exchange of views with the head of the delegation that had observed the local elections in Turkey on 31 March, Andrew DAWSON (UK, ECR), the Bureau decided to issue a statement on the post-election situation in Turkey and, in particular on the appeals and recount of votes currently being organised in several municipalities and some of the comments made by the Turkish authorities on the Congress' observation mission (see APPENDIX 6).

B. THE SESSIONS

35th Session – 6-8 November 2018

During this session, the Congress renewed its presidency. It elected Anders KNAPE as President, Gunn Marit HELGESEN as President of the Chamber of Regions and Xavier CADORET as President of the Chamber of Local Authorities. The three Congress Committees also held elections, with Gabriele NEFF and Leendert VERBEEK being re-elected as Chairs respectively of the Current Affairs Committee and the Monitoring Committee, while Robert GRÜMAN was elected as Chair of the Governance Committee (see APPENDIX 1)

The theme of the session was "Integrity and ethical behaviour of local and regional elected representatives" and the Congress examined several reports for adoption on this topic, covering conflicts of interest at local and regional level, transparency and open government, and the revision of the Code of Conduct for All Persons Involved in Local and Regional Governance. The Congress's Rules and Procedures were updated in order to incorporate a code of conduct specific to Congress members. These reports are all part of the road map of activities to prevent corruption and promote public ethics at local and regional level adopted by the Congress in 2016.

Against the background of the various crises that Europe is undergoing, the members of the Congress held several debates on the challenges facing towns, cities and regions. The migration issue was addressed during two debates on "Voting rights at local level as an element of the successful long-term integration of migrants and internally displaced persons in Europe's municipalities and regions" and on "Border regions facing migration phenomena". In addition, members discussed the situation of mayors under pressure, the financial difficulties that local authorities face, and how to reconcile territorial solidarity and regional self-government. They also considered the draft guidelines on the right of local authorities to be consulted by higher levels of government.

As part of the regular monitoring of local and regional democracy in Europe, the Congress examined for adoption reports on local democracy in Lithuania and Slovenia and on local and regional democracy in Georgia in the presence of Darius URBONAS, Vice-Minister, Ministry of the Interior of Lithuania (see II. C. THE CHAMBERS) and Maya TSKITISHVILI, Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia. The Minister highlighted that since parliamentary elections in 2012, regional development, local democracy and decentralization of the power has been declared as one of the most important priorities of her government. She recalled that recommendations given by the Congress back in 2013 served as guiding principles in defining its objectives in this process. She reaffirmed full commitment towards strengthening and empowering local self-government institutions through gradual decentralization of the power, taking into consideration need for further development of financial and professional capabilities of the local governance.

Information reports on the observation of early elections in seven municipalities of the Republic of Moldova (20 May 2018), municipal elections in the Netherlands (21 March 2018) and municipal elections in Tunisia (6 May 2018) were also presented (see III. B. OBSERVATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS).

Citizen participation was also a central theme of the 35th session, in particular with the contribution of youth delegates from 42 Member States, who sat alongside the members of the Congress (without voting rights). At the session, the youth delegates presented the grassroots projects which they had prepared in their respective local authorities. In addition, there was a debate on the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) focusing on the need to give fresh impetus to this annual pan-European event which is co-ordinated by the Congress.

The Congress also adopted a recommendation which included several proposals for the reform of its political functioning. The aim is to consolidate its institutional role as a guarantor of local and regional democracy within the Council of Europe, while strengthening its capacity to act with greater flexibility. In particular, the Congress proposes to improve the representativeness of its Bureau, to give greater flexibility in the distribution of their delegates between the two chambers of the Congress. And to extend the terms of office of Congress delegates to five years and those of vice-Presidents and committee chairs to two and a half years. The adopted recommendation also confirms the current size of the Congress, with 324 representatives and 324 substitutes, as well as the holding of two annual sessions. Finally, the role of political groups is recognised for the first time in the draft revised Charter. The report was presented by Xavier CADORET and Marc COOLS (Belgium, ILDG). After the session, the recommendation was submitted to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for consideration and adoption.

At the opening of the session, Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM, the outgoing President, took stock of the activities and achievements of the Congress during the two years of her term of office (2016-2018). She spoke of the high quality of the work and discussions that had helped to convey the Congress's political message. She stressed that the policy the Congress has been following for ten years is to focus on its competences, in particular through the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the observation of local and regional elections and co-operation programmes underlining that this pragmatic policy allows the Congress to contribute effectively to the local and regional dimension of the Council of Europe's activities.

Guest-speakers at the session included Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of Croatia as Chair of the Committee of Ministers. In her address Mrs PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ stressed the capacity for resilience and innovation of towns, cities and regions and praised the work of the Congress and its European Charter of Local Self-Government as a major achievement of the Council of Europe. She confirmed that resources were scarce, that responsibilities were heavy, but that action at the grassroots level was nonetheless essential to ensure that the well-being and fundamental rights of citizens are safeguarded.

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The overall theme of the two sessions in 2019 is "Mayors safeguarding democracy". A debate was held on this topic, with the participation of Ignacio SANCHEZ AMOR, Spanish Secretary of State of Territorial Policy.

The third in a series of debates focusing on "Mayors under pressure" highlighted the difficulties faced by local and regional authorities and their elected representatives. In the context of the assassination of Pawel ADAMOWICZ, Mayor of Gdansk, newly elected Mayor of that city, Aleksandra DULKIEWICZ, sent a message contributing to the discussion which was read during the debate by the Chair of the Monitoring Committee Leendert VERBEEK (see II.C. CHAMBER OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES).

A debate on "Open government in regional areas" was held in the Chamber of Regions (see II. C. CHAMBER OF REGIONS). The questions of how to address the urban/rural divide, the financial compensation of local and regional elected representatives in the exercise of their office and the protection of whistle-blowers were also the subject of specific debates and, building on the efforts of the Congress to promote ethics in public service, the members looked at ways of fighting nepotism within local and regional authorities.

Within the framework of its monitoring activities, the Congress adopted reports on local and regional democracy in Poland and in the Republic of Moldova in the presence of Renata SZCZĘCH, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration of Poland and Adrian ERMURACHI, Deputy Secretary General of the Government of the Republic of Moldova (see III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY). The members also discussed reports on the observation of elections to the cantonal assemblies in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (7 October 2018), local government elections in Poland (21 October 2018) and local elections in the Republic of Slovenia (18 November 2018) (see III. B. OBSERVATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS).

A resolution granting the status of Partner for Local Democracy to the Kingdom of Morocco was adopted. This makes it the first country to enjoy this status which offers the Council of Europe's neighbouring countries an ideal platform for dialogue and institutional contacts with their European counterparts. The Moroccan delegation comprises 6 representatives and 6 substitutes who are able to sit alongside Congress members and contribute to the debates during sessions – albeit without the right to vote – and to the work of its Committees (see APPENDIX 5)

Youth delegates from 42 Member States participated in the debates, as they have done since October 2014 as part of the "rejuvenating politics" initiative run by the Congress in its drive to promote the participation of young people at local and regional level. A report on the role of local and regional authorities in safeguarding young people's social rights was discussed and adopted.

The contribution of the Congress to the Helsinki process on the future of the Council of Europe, initiated by the Finnish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, and a debate on the budget and resources of the Congress for the next biennium (2020-2021) were also on the agenda (see APPENDIX 4 and 5).

Jari PARTANEN, State Secretary of Transport and Communications of Finland, Liliane MAURY PASQUIER, President of the Parliamentary Assembly and Thorbjørn JAGLAND, Secretary General of the Council of Europe addressed the members of the Congress.

Speaking on behalf of the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers Jari PARTANEN, referred to the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the monitoring carried out by the Congress. He said that its impact could still be seen in Finland's Local Government Act. He said it was important to ensure that the Council of Europe and its core work on behalf of human rights, democracy and the rule of law could continue in the future, despite the reform process and the other challenges the Organisation is facing.

Liliane MAURY PASQUIER stressed the importance of increased co-operation between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress, referring in particular to the contribution to the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the attaining of its sustainable development goals, especially goal 5 on gender equality. She said it was against the backdrop of today's challenges that the Congress has a very important contribution to make to the Council of Europe's thinking on its future. The direct communication channel which local and regional elected representatives have with their citizens plays a crucial role in helping those representatives rise to the numerous challenges facing Europe: migratory flows and the reception of refugees, the surge in populism, mistrust towards democratic institutions or the escalation of violent extremism.

In the political and budgetary crisis facing the Organisation, Thorbjørn JAGLAND reasserted the importance of local and regional authorities. He said that more co-operation with local authorities was needed in order to maximise the impact of the Council of Europe. The Secretary General stressed that the crisis must not undo all that the Council of Europe had achieved, reiterating the importance of the Organisation and its work. To ensure that the Council of Europe could continue to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law, it should continue to be funded by all its member states and Mr Jagland called on Congress members to inform their governments of the particularly difficult situation facing the Congress and the Council of Europe.

C. THE CHAMBERS

Chamber of Local Authorities

The Chamber held its 35th Session on 6 November 2018 and its 36th Session on 3 April 2019.

At its 35th Session, the Chamber elected Xavier CADORET (France, SOC) as President for a two-year term and then elected its 7 Vice-Presidents (see APPENDIX 1).

The Chamber examined a report and recommendation on the situation of local democracy in Lithuania, following the third monitoring visit, which was conducted on 23 and 24 January 2018 in the municipalities of Vilnius, Kaunas and Elektrėnai by the rapporteurs, Artur TORRES PEREIRA (Portugal, EPP/CCE) and Sigurdur Bjorn BLONDAL (Iceland, ILDG) (see III.MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY)

Speaking during the debate, Darius URBONAS, Lithuania's Vice-Minister for the Interior, welcomed the recommendations in the report and confirmed his country's commitment to make the necessary changes to improve local democracy in his country. He stressed that Lithuania appreciated the

recommendations proposed by the Congress experts because their proposals allow the authorities to take a fresh look at the situation in Lithuania and to focus more on areas for improvement, recalling that, in line with the previous Congress recommendation, the principle of subsidiarity in Lithuania has been included since 2016 in the law on local self-government.

The Chamber proceeded to examine a report and adopt a recommendation on local democracy in Slovenia, following a monitoring visit to the country in February 2018 by the co-rapporteurs Henrik Brade JOHANSEN (Denmark, ILDG) and Gaye DOGANOGLU (Turkey, EPP/CCE). The report highlights the issue of municipal fragmentation in Slovenia and encourages the central government to continue to promote mergers and inter-municipal co-operation (see III.MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY)

This was followed by an information report on the municipal elections in the Netherlands on 21 March 2018, presented by rapporteur Stewart DICKSON on behalf of the Monitoring Committee (see III.MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY)

The session concluded with the second in its series of debates on the theme “Mayors under pressure”.

Speakers included Andrzej PORAWSKI, Director of the Association of Polish Cities, who raised the cases of pressure being exerted on the mayors of several Polish cities, and the Mayor of Šabac in Serbia, Nebojsa ZELENOVIC, who reported on problems facing Serbian mayors who did not belong to the ruling party. The panellists agreed that the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the monitoring performed by the Congress were benchmark instruments in combating corruption and the violation of the fundamental rights of citizens and elected representatives. Jean-Yves CAMUS, Special Adviser to the General Delegate for International Relations of the City of Paris, then presented the plans of the City of Paris to set up an observatory to monitor the situation of mayors under threat.

The Chamber opened its 36th Session with a third and final debate on “Mayors under pressure”, beginning with a message from the Mayor of Gdansk, Aleksandra DULKIEWICZ, read by Leendert VERBEEK. Jos WIENEN (Netherlands, EPP/CCE), Mayor of Haarlem, Netherlands and Andreas HOLLSTEIN, Mayor of Altena, Germany, also informed the Chamber of the pressures and threats that they were facing.

The Chamber then heard a report on the Ad-hoc assessment mission on the local elections held in the Republic of Slovenia on 18 November 2018, presented by rapporteur Robert GRUMAN (see III.MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY)

The session concluded with a thematic debate on “Addressing the urban/rural divide: solutions for territorial renewal” with presentations by Dr. Karl KOESSLER, Senior Researcher and Group Leader, Institute for Comparative Federalism EURAC research (European Academy of Bolzano), Italy, Jane ATTERTON, Rural Policy Centre Manager and Policy Researcher, Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC) and Anni AHLAKORPI, Member of the Municipal Council of Utsjoki, Finland. The debate concluded that closer interaction between urban and rural areas is essential for local authorities in Europe.

Chamber of Regions

The Chamber of Regions held its 35th Session on 6 November 2018 and its 36th Session on 3 April 2019.

At its 35th Session, the Chamber re-elected Gunn Marit HELGESEN its President for a two-year term and elected its 7 Vice-Presidents (see APPENDIX 1).

The Chamber held a debate on border regions facing migration phenomena and adopted a Recommendation and a Resolution presented by Eirini DOUROU (Greece, SOC). Guest speakers for this debate included Martin GUILLERMO-RAMÍREZ, Secretary General of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR); Laura FERRARA (Italy), Vice-Chair of the Committee on Legal Affairs of the European Parliament and Rapporteur on the Common Procedure for Asylum; and Fatma SAHIN (Turkey), Mayor of the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality and President of the Union of Turkish Municipalities.

The Chamber also held a debate on “Territorial Solidarity: Regional Self-Government or Regional Selfish Government”, with the participation of Jean-Pierre GRIN (Switzerland, ALDE), General Rapporteur on local and regional authorities of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly; Romain PASQUIER (France), Director of Research at the National Centre of Scientific Research (CNRS) and University Professor in Rennes; and Thomas MÜTZE (Germany), Member of the Bavarian State Parliament. Speakers in the debate

stressed the importance of fair burden sharing between regions while cautioning against achieving the regional balance by impoverishing some of them for the benefit of others; they pointed out the current limitations of states in ensuring territorial cohesion and the need to promote “territorial justice” by strengthening the role of states in financial equalisation while expanding the role of regional and local authorities in grassroots policies such as transport, education and the environment.

During its 36th Session, the Chamber adopted a Recommendation on the elections of the Cantonal Assemblies in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (held on 7 October 2018), presented by Rapporteur Stewart DICKSON and held a first-ever “free debate”, allowing for its members to speak on subject matters that were not included in the session’s agenda.

In addition, it held a debate on Open Government at regional level, with a particular focus on transparency in procedures and in communication and on mechanisms for greater dialogue with citizens and their involvement. Guest speakers for this debate included Donatella PORZI (Italy), President of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE); David GOESSMANN, Policy Analyst of the Public Governance Directorate of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); and Luis PETRIKORENA ARBELAIZ, (Spain), Director of the “Gobierno Abierto” platform of the Presidency of the Government of the Basque Country. Speakers underlined that open government was organised around three main strands of citizen participation, transparent decision-making and accountability of elected representatives, but should also include the notion of trust and the independence of civil society from the government, and that the concept of open government was a way to improve interaction between citizens and all levels of local and regional governance, and probably foreshadowed the advent of “open states”. Members of the Chamber had an opportunity to present numerous open government initiatives adopted by their regions: these included citizens’ conferences on the integration of refugees in Lower Saxony or on air pollution in Stuttgart (Germany), a platform for dialogue on the environment set up by the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, and the regular publication, online, of open budgets by the authorities in the Russian region of Leningrad as well as the digitisation of documents and access to 250 public services by the Republic of Tatarstan.

D. THE COMMITTEES

Monitoring Committee

The members of the Monitoring Committee met on 6 November 2018 during the 35th Session of the Congress in Strasbourg. They re-elected Leendert VERBEEK Chair of the Monitoring Committee and elected five Vice-chairs (see APPENDIX 1).

The members took note of the reports under preparation, in particular on the observation of the cantonal assembly elections in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (7 October 2018) and the local elections in Poland (18-22 October) and on the situation of local and regional democracy in the Russian Federation (23-25 October 2018) and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (20-23 November 2018).

The Committee also approved its work programme for 2019-2020.

A second meeting of the Monitoring Committee took place in Belgrade, Serbia, on 7 February 2019. It examined, for adoption, reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in Poland and the Republic of Moldova, as well as a report on the elections for the Cantonal Assemblies of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (7 October 2018). In addition, an information report on the local elections in Poland (21 October 2018) was presented for discussion in view of the debate during the April session.

The Committee also discussed the monitoring procedures in progress concerning the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Russian Federation. The draft recommendations for both countries are expected to be submitted for adoption at the 37th session in October 2019.

Finally, as part of the Congress’ activities to promote human rights at the local and regional levels, the Committee discussed the themes that will be covered in the second volume of the Handbook on Human Rights. The first volume, published in November 2018, focuses on the right to non-discrimination against three groups: refugees, asylum seekers and migrants; Roma and Travellers; and LGBTI persons. It includes a presentation of the legal framework and the role that local and regional authorities can play in the field of human rights, as well as 65 good practices implemented in more than 25 countries.

The Committee met again on 2 April 2019 during the 36th Session of the Congress and heard about the second parts of the monitoring visits in Bosnia Herzegovina and Russian Federation, and about the

monitoring in Hungary. The Committee was informed on the pre-election visit carried out in Ankara on 14 March 2014 and the Congress election observation mission to observe local elections in Turkey held on 31 March 2019. The draft report will be submitted for adoption at the next meeting of the Monitoring Committee on 3 July 2019 in Oslo, Norway.

Governance Committee

At their meeting on 6 November 2018, during the 35th Session of the Congress, in Strasbourg, the members of the Governance Committee elected Robert GRUMAN (Romania, EPP/CCE) as Chair of the Committee and elected the five vice-chairs of the Committee (see APPENDIX 1).

The members approved draft reports on “Protecting whistleblowers”, presented by Josan MEIJERS, (Netherlands, SOC), and “Fighting nepotism within local and regional authorities”, presented by Wilma DELISSEN VAN TONGERLO (Netherlands, ILDG).

The members also approved a draft report on “Financial compensation of local and regional elected representatives and public officials in the exercise of their office”, presented by the co-rapporteurs Marta CAMPARANI-TALABER (Hungary, EPP/CCE) and Robert GRUMAN and examined the reports which are currently being prepared.

The Committee also met on 2 April 2019 during the 36th Session of the Congress, during which meeting the election for the five vice-chairs was rerun (see APPENDIX 2), following a complaint about irregularities at the previous election.

The members of the Committee then held an exchange of views on two reports which are currently being prepared: “Fair distribution of taxes in transfrontier areas”, presented by Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ (Belgium, SOC), a report which highlights issues concerning the distribution of taxation revenue from transfrontier workers in member states, and a report on “The use of languages by local and regional authorities”, presented by Andrew DAWSON (United Kingdom, ECR), which examines how linguistic diversity can be handled by local and regional authorities to the benefit of all concerned.

The members also approved draft terms of reference for reports on “Tourism tax and home sharing platforms” and “The future of the municipal councilor” which highlights the decline of political accountability in Europe’s cities.

Finally, the members held an exchange of views with Peter ANDRE, Chair of the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG).

The Committee will next meet on 13 June 2019 in Várpalota, Veszprem County, Hungary.

Current Affairs Committee

The Committee had two meetings, both in Strasbourg, respectively on 6 November 2018 when it elected its five Vice-chairs (see APPENDIX 1), and on 2 April 2019. Items on the agenda of the November meeting included a report on “Safeguarding young people’s social rights: the role of local and regional authorities”, prepared by Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC) and Liisa ANSALA (Finland, ILDG), adopted at the 36th session of the Congress on 3 April 2019. The Committee also adopted terms of reference for a report on the role of local and regional governments in protecting internally displaced persons (IDPs) presented by Oleksandr SIENKEVYCH (Ukraine, ILDG).

The April meeting of the Committee was consecrated to debates, respectively on regional identities (proposed by the Chamber of Regions), on single persons, as a new focus for local policies (by Carla DEJONGHE (Belgium, ILDG)) and on access to essential health services for refugees and migrants as a fundamental human right (by Brigitte VAN DEN BERG (Netherlands, ILDG)). The Committee also discussed and supported a report proposal from Henrietta BERO (Hungary, EPP/CCE) and by Sebastian VOGT from the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) on the role of local authorities regarding youth work, A terms of reference thereon will be discussed at the summer meeting of the Committee.

Nawel RAFIK ELMRINI (France, SOC) made a presentation on ‘Putting in place the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees in Strasbourg’ and the testimonies of two refugees who benefited from this passport. John WARMISHAM (United Kingdom, SOC), Rapporteur on Roma-related activities presented the results of the 2nd meeting of the Ukrainian Alliance of mayors for Roma inclusion organised in the City of Lviv. Videos prepared on this occasion for promoting Roma as full citizens and calling for a stop to attacks against Roma were presented during the session. (see IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES).

The Committee will next meet in Stuttgart, Germany on 28 June 2019.

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 October 2018, the Congress undertook 5 monitoring visits in the 3 following Member States

Russian Federation (23 - 25 October 2018)

A delegation from the Congress carried out a monitoring visit to examine the situation of local and regional democracy in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the Russian Federation in 1998.

The co-rapporteurs Jakob WIENEN and Stewart DICKSON focused on the developments in the field of local self-government occurred in Russian Federation since the adoption of the last Congress recommendation, on 28 October 2010.

Meetings were scheduled in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, in particular with the Deputy Minister of Justice, the officials from the Ministry of Finance, the Deputy Chairman of the State Duma, the Chair of the Federation Council Committee on Federal Structure, Regional Policy, Local Government and Northern Affairs as well as with the officials from Moscow City Duma (Regional Parliament) and the City of Moscow. In Saint Petersburg the delegation met the Judge of the Constitutional Court and the officials from the Leningrad Region Administration and the Leningrad Region Legislative Assembly.

The delegation held discussions with the National Delegation of Russian Federation to the Congress and members of National Congress of Russian Municipalities as well as with representatives of the Association of small and medium-sized cities of Russia, the Union of small cities of Russian Federation and the Union of Russian Cities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (20 - 22 November 2018)

A delegation from the Congress carried out a monitoring visit to examine the situation of local and regional democracy in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2002.

Co-Rapporteurs Lelia HUNZIKER (Switzerland, SOC) and Carla DEJONGHE focused on the developments in the field of local and regional self-government occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the adoption of the last Congress monitoring recommendation, in March 2012.

Meetings were scheduled in the cities of Sarajevo, East Sarajevo and Banja Luka, in particular, with the Speaker of the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Vice-President of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Human Rights Ombudspersons of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Deputy Mayor of Sarajevo, the President of the East Sarajevo City Council, and the President of the Brčko District Assembly.

In Banja Luka the delegation met the Minister of Administration and Local Self-government of the Republika Srpska, the President of the Constitutional Court of the Republika Srpska, the Mayor of Banja Luka, and the Auditor General of the Supreme Office for the Republika Srpska Public Sector Auditing.

The delegation held discussions with the members of the National Delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Congress, the representatives of the Association of municipalities and cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Association of local authorities of Republic of Srpska.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (19-21 February 2019)

For this second part of the monitoring visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina meetings were held in Sarajevo with high representatives of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: in particular with the Minister of Justice, the Speaker of the House of Representatives of Parliament, the President of the Constitutional Court and the Deputy Auditor General of the Audit Office for the institutions.

In the Canton of Sarajevo, the delegation had exchanges with the President of the Canton Assembly, the Prime Minister of the Canton and the Minister of Finance of the Canton.

The delegation also met the Minister of Justice, Administration and Local Self-Government of the Government of the Canton of Herzegovina-Neretva, the Head of the Prime Minister Office of the Government of the Canton of Herzegovina-Neretva and the Deputy President of the Herzegovina-Neretva Cantonal Assembly. In Jablanica, the delegation visited the mayor of the municipality and in the city of Mostar, the acting mayor.

The report and draft recommendation will be submitted for adoption by the Congress Session in October 2019.

Russian Federation (5 - 7 March 2019)

For this second part of the monitoring visit to the Russian meetings were scheduled in Moscow, Kazan and Cheboksary, in particular with the representatives of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the representatives of some political parties and the members of the association of independent deputies in Moscow.

The delegation also met with the representatives at local and regional level in the Republics of Tatarstan and Chuvashia. An exchange of views took place with the Minister of Finance of the Tatarstan Republic, the Minister of Justice of the Tatarstan Republic, the Minister of Finance of the Chuvash Republic, the Minister of Justice of the Chuvash Republic as well as with the representatives of the State Councils, the Accounts Chambers and the Constitutional and the Supreme Courts of the two Republics. At local level, the meetings were scheduled with the mayors of Kazan and Cheboksary. The delegation also held discussions with the members of the Association "Council of the Tatarstan Republic Municipalities" in Kazan.

The report and draft recommendation will be submitted for adoption by the 37th Congress Session in October 2019.

Hungary (19 - 21 March 2019)

A delegation from the Congress assessed the implementation of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which Hungary ratified in 1994.

The co-rapporteurs Marc COOLS and Jean-Pierre LIOUVILLE (France, SOC), considered how local self-government has evolved in the country since the adoption of the Congress's last recommendation, on 29 October 2013.

Meetings were scheduled in Budapest, Budaörs, Salgótarján and Rákócziabánya, in particular with the Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister, the State Secretary responsible for budgetary affairs at the Ministry of Finance, the President of the National Audit Office, the Vice-President of the National Assembly, Constitutional Court judges and the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights.

The delegation also held exchanges with the Deputy Mayor of Budapest, the Mayor of the 6th District of Budapest, the President of the General Assembly of the County of Nógrád and the mayors of Budaörs, Salgótarján and Rákócziabánya. Meetings were also planned with representatives of several Hungarian associations of local and regionally authorities and with members of the Hungarian delegation to the Congress.

The report and draft recommendation should be presented for adoption during the 37th session of the Congress in October 2019.

Adopted Recommendations

Local democracy in Slovenia (Rec 421)

The report and recommendation adopted on 6 November 2018 follow a monitoring visit to the country in February 2018 by the co-rapporteurs Henrik Brade JOHANSEN (Denmark, ILDG) and Gaye DOGANOGLU.

The overall conclusions of the adopted report and recommendation are that Slovenia complies with the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, but consensus between central and local authorities in the principles of municipal financing should be achieved, local fiscal autonomy increased, local authorities better consulted in practice on matters affecting them and mergers and inter-municipal cooperation promoted

The Rapporteurs welcomed the “exemplary role” played by the Constitutional Court in applying the Charter and referring to it systematically in its case-law. They underlined that the representative associations of local communities can bring a complaint before the Constitutional Court which can be considered as an example of best practice for other Council of Europe member states.

The rapporteurs also noted with satisfaction that the principle of local self-government is recognised both by the constitution and the domestic legislation and Slovenian local authorities enjoy legal protection, and a variety of instruments of direct public participation in the local decision-making processes, including referendum, exist.

The Congress calls on the Slovenian Government to achieve consensus, in consultation with local authorities, on the principles of municipal financing and to increase local fiscal autonomy, to simplify the existing legal regulations of certain tasks at local level, to ensure that local authorities are more effectively consulted in planning and decision-making processes in all matters directly concerning them and to address the municipal fragmentation in Slovenia.

Local democracy in Lithuania (Rec 420)

The report and recommendation adopted on 6 November 2018 follow the third monitoring visit, which was conducted on 23 and 24 January 2018 in the municipalities of Vilnius, Kaunas and Elektrėnai by the rapporteurs, Artur TORRES PEREIRA (Portugal, EPP/CCE), and Sigurdur Bjorn Blondal (Iceland, ILDG).

Overall, the adopted texts underline the good level of local democracy in Lithuania, noting that the country has embedded the fundamental principles of local self-government in its legislation and made progress in extending municipalities’ rights in managing state-owned land. In addition, local authorities and their association (ALAL) are now regularly consulted, and citizens’ participation in public decision making has been strengthened.

However, the rapporteurs pointed out that, in practice, some legal regulations tend to restrict municipal autonomy and local authorities’ ability to act independently. Despite a quick economic recovery from the financial crisis and increasing local budgets, local authorities’ financial resources are still not commensurate with their responsibilities. Regarding administrative structures, they express disappointment that Vilnius still does not enjoy a special legal status as capital city and that the administrative capacities and functions of the Regional Development Councils also remain limited.

The Congress recommends that Lithuania’s national authorities ensure better implementation of the subsidiarity principle in practice by allocating enough resources to municipalities and providing them with access to capital markets for investment expenditure. It also urges them to grant the association the right to initiate legal proceedings before administrative courts and to further develop citizens’ participation at sub-municipal level.

Local and regional democracy in Georgia (Rec 426)

The report and recommendation adopted on 7 November 2018 follow a monitoring visit to Georgia in April 2018 by the Congress delegation.

The key findings of the adopted report and recommendation are that substantial progress has been achieved in the field of local and regional democracy in Georgia over the past 15 years, but lack of clarity in competences distribution, difficulties faced by opposition members in access to the information held by municipal administrations, and risks of over-concentration of power in the hands of mayors should be addressed.

Among the positive developments are the explicit recognition of the principle of subsidiarity by the Constitution, introduction of direct election of mayors, establishment of new mechanisms of citizens’ participation, general increase in financial capacities of local government through additional tax revenue, modernization of the auditing system, further reinforcement of the constitutional status of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, and active involvement of the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) in decision-making.

Local and regional democracy in Poland (Rec 431)

The report and recommendation adopted on 2 April 2019 were prepared by David BARO RIBA (Andorra, NR) and Pascal MANGIN (France, EPP/CCE) after of a monitoring visit to Poland in June 2018.

One of the key findings of the adopted report and recommendation is that the situation of local and regional democracy in Poland has changed significantly over the past years: formerly one of the “top ten” countries in the EU, in terms of the level of local autonomy, Poland now shows “relatively alarming trends”.

The rapporteurs underlined that the principle of local self-government is recognised both by the Constitution and the domestic legislation, and the European Charter of Local Self-Government benefits from “a quasi-constitutional status”. They also highlighted the freedom of association enjoyed by local authorities and the special status accorded to the capital city Warsaw.

However, they voiced their concern at the recentralization, eroding the level of autonomy of local authorities, which has been taking place in the context of a conflict between the central and the local authorities, in particular those controlled by opposition parties.

Criticism was also expressed at the interference by central authorities in local affairs, weaknesses in the consultation process, the deterioration of the status of elected representatives, the lack of sufficient financial resources, including from local taxes and charges, and the loss of confidence of local authorities in the judiciary.

The Congress recommended national authorities to return to the path of decentralization, reversing the trend towards the re-allocation of local/regional competences to the State, ensure that the subsidiarity principle is applied in practice and that supervision of the activities of local authorities is proportional. They should avoid overregulation, reinstate a fair consultation process with local authorities, allocate sufficient financial resources to them and enable them to establish local taxes.

Local and regional democracy in Republic of Moldova (Rec 436)

The report and recommendation adopted on 4 April 2019 were prepared by co-rapporteurs Marc COOLS and Gunn Marit HELGESEN following a monitoring visit to the Republic of Moldova from 13 to 15 June 2018.

The adopted texts express the Congress’ concern about the trend to re-centralisation and the unsatisfactory level of local democracy in the Republic of Moldova. They point out several shortcomings including the very limited fiscal autonomy and resources of local authorities, which makes them dependent from State transfers and subsidies. They also criticise the lack of precision of the grounds to activate recall referenda, which make mayors work under the permanent threat of a revocation referendum.

In addition, they regret that the State intervenes in local affairs through a supervision of local authorities which seems to be very invasive, frequent and discretionary, and that there are not appropriate consultation mechanisms between the central government and the local authorities. Another issue for concern is that the political context for the exercise of mayoral functions in the country is negatively affected by the intensive practice of bringing criminal prosecution against mayors and local representatives.

The situation with the position of the Mayor of Chişinău is also described as unsatisfactory, because since May 2017 the capital city has been run by acting mayors after the June 2018 elections were declared null and void on controversial grounds, preventing the elected candidate from starting his mandate.

Positive aspects are that the principle of local self-government is explicitly recognised in the Moldovan Constitution and in relevant legislation, that efforts have been made towards the full ratification of the Charter of Local Self Government and that the present arrangements for the Autonomous Territorial Unit (ATU) of Gagauzia represent a political compromise that is working well in general terms despite some points of tension.

As a consequence of its findings, the Congress calls the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers to invite the Moldovan authorities to implement a number of measures addressing the problems identified.

The debate took place during the 36th session in the presence of Adrian ERMURACHI, Deputy Secretary General of the Government of the Republic of Moldova. He said that the report was useful in determining priority actions and guiding the authorities for the continuous improvement of local democracy. He underlined that the recommendations of the Congress on decentralisation have gradually been implemented and the authorities counted on the support of the Council of Europe and the Congress in implementing reforms as regard local governance and moving to a new stage of the post-monitoring dialogue.

B. 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

Poland (18 - 22 October 2018)

A delegation from the Congress conducted an electoral assessment mission to Poland from 18 to 22 October 2018. The mission focused on the local elections held on 21 October in the whole country and, more particularly, on the ballot in the cities of Warsaw, Lublin, Lodz, Krakow and Wroclaw.

Before election day, the Congress delegation, led by Jos WIENEN, thematic spokesperson for the observation of local and regional elections, attended meetings with various interlocutors, including the Polish Commissioner for Human Rights, the President of the National Electoral Commission of the Republic of Poland, the Mayor of Warsaw, as well as representatives of diplomatic corps, political parties, the media and civil society.

Slovenia (16- 18 November 2018)

A delegation from the Congress carried out an ad hoc mission of limited scope to the Republic of Slovenia at the invitation of the Slovenian Minister of Public Administration, in the context of the municipal elections of 18 November 2018 and visited several polling stations in Ljubljana and its surroundings on the election day.

The Congress delegation met representatives of the diplomatic corps, a representative of the Ministry of Public Administration, the State Election Commission of the Republic of Slovenia and representatives of political parties. Meetings were also held with the mayors of Smarjeske Toplice, Kocevje, and Breda PECAN, former Vice-President of the Congress and City Councillor of Izola.

The delegation also participated in meetings with representatives of the Italian and Hungarian national communities and the Roma community, as well as representatives of NGOs and the media.

Local elections in Turkey (14 March and 27 March - 1 April 2019)

Pre-election visit to Ankara (14 March 2019)

A delegation from the Congress led by Andrew DAWSON (United Kingdom, ECR), carried out this pre-election visit in Ankara in order to evaluate the campaign and the preparations of the local elections to be held in Turkey on 31 March 2019.

The delegation met with representatives of the diplomatic corps in Ankara and members of the Supreme Electoral Council. Exchanges were also held with representatives of national associations of local authorities, media representatives and NGOs.

Election observation (27 March - 1 April 2019)

A delegation comprising 22 observers from 20 countries also led by Andrew DAWSON, carried out the election observation mission to assess the local elections to be held on Sunday 31 March 2019.

On 28 and 29 March, the delegation held briefings in Ankara with representatives of the diplomatic corps, State authorities, NGOs, thinktanks, media and political parties.

On Election Day, ten Congress teams witnessed voting taking place in around 140 polling stations throughout Turkey including Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Antalya, Adana, Erzurum and Diyarbakir.

Speaking at a press conference in Ankara after the local elections on 31 March, the Head of the delegation of the Congress presented preliminary conclusions (see APPENDIX 6)

Adopted reports

During the 35th session, the Congress adopted the following reports:

Information report on local elections in Tunisia

In May 2018, an Electoral Assessment Delegation from the Congress was invited to observe the first municipal elections held in Tunisia after the Arab Spring of 2011.

As a result, an Information Report was prepared which describes the vote as successfully accomplished despite the difficult socio-economic and political situation and calls for amendments of the legal framework of elections, in particular regarding the regulation of the media, eligibility requirements and the submission of candidatures.

The Head of the Delegation Xavier CADORET regretted the low turnout, with only 34% of the electorate having exercised the right to vote, not least due to the political disenchantment in the country, as well as to the markedly scant media coverage of the election campaign.

According to the report, very strict rules on the allocation of air-time to the different lists and political parties could potentially deter private television channels from covering the campaign “for fear of being sanctioned by the regulating authority”. Particular attention should be paid to the creation of a regulatory framework for media allowing for a fully-fledged electoral campaign, to the simplification of eligibility requirements and to addressing the issue of misuse of administrative resources. It also stresses the need for improvement in the area of legal requirements for compiling the lists of candidates, which proved complicated and over-restrictive in practice and to review the practice of sorting voters by age groups in polling stations.

The Congress pledges for further support for the country, in particular in the framework of the South-Mediterranean Partnership and the Congress’ Co-operation programme with Tunisia_which aims at reinforcing local governance.

Information Report on the local elections in the Netherlands

The information Report followed the assessment of the elections held in 335 Dutch municipalities on 21 March 2018.

Rapporteur Stewart DICKSON underlined the open and transparent nature of the electoral process. He also stated that in the Netherlands, the right to vote in local elections is based on voters’ permanent residence, which is “conducive to citizen participation and in line with the Congress Recommendation on voters residing de facto abroad”.

However, the report also identifies some areas for improvements, inter alia, the absence of regulations designed to limit campaign expenditure and the lack of transparency and balance in terms of subsidies for contestants at the local level.

The Congress recommends the Dutch authorities to introduce thresholds for the spending of local parties, adopt financial transparency rules, ensure that all candidates have equal access to the media and revise the practice of proxy voting. Furthermore, it urges the Government to commit itself to revising the procedure for appointing Mayors and King’s Commissioners.

Information report on early local elections in Moldova

The report presents the findings of the Congress delegation that assessed the early local elections held on 20 May in seven Moldovan municipalities including the two largest cities, Chişinău and Balti.

The Head of Delegation, Gunn-Marit HELGESEN drew attention to the current challenges for local democracy in the Republic of Moldova, not least against the backdrop of the events further to the suspension of the former Mayor of Chisinau, Dorin CHIRTOACA, and a recall referendum that was organised against him in 2017, following different charges on abuse of power.

According to the report, the local elections were well prepared from a technical point of view and administered by an overall experienced electoral staff in the polling stations, despite some procedural inconsistencies, mainly regarding the sealing of the ballot boxes, as well as isolated tensions observed in localities outside Chisinau, on an Election Day that can be described as orderly and calm, by and large. However, the Delegation had received reports about pressure exerted on local elected representatives using investigations, court proceedings and business influence, mainly to make mayors and councillors change their party affiliation. Moreover, the Congress observers were informed about

cases of misuse of administrative resources, campaign financing violations, and the lack of fair access to the media for all the candidates.

Following this Assessment Mission and looking ahead to the next local elections due for spring 2019, the Congress emphasises the need to ensure the fair representation of local populations in elections, to further improve the accuracy of voters' lists and to better regulate the use of video equipment in polling stations. The Congress called on policy makers in the Republic of Moldova to do their utmost to ensure that the next local elections were fair, transparent and democratic.

During the 36th session, the Congress adopted the following reports:

Information report on the assessment of local government elections in Poland

The information report follows the Congress mission to assess the local government elections held in Poland on 21 October 2018.

The report, presented by the Head of delegation Jos WIENEN states that considering the complexity of the multi-level local electoral process in Poland and the recent introduction of significant changes to the Electoral Code, the polling observed was well organised and carried out in an orderly manner.

The report underlines the high turnout at the polling stations, an indication of the high level of public confidence in the election management process. It is also pleased to note that domestic NGOs are now able to observe elections.

The Congress nevertheless invites the authorities to implement coherent E-day procedures, to step up organisational resources and training for Precinct Election Commissions and to raise citizens' awareness of the importance of the secrecy of the vote. To ensure the validity of the vote, clear instructions regarding the marking of the ballots are advisable.

In addition, it recommends in accordance with the recommendations of the Venice Commission, that any fundamental change in the electoral law are introduced at least one year before the next elections.

Report on the ad-hoc assessment mission of the local elections in Slovenia

The report follows an ad-hoc assessment of the local elections of 18 November 2018 in Slovenia.

Presented by the Head of delegation Robert Gruman, the report gives an overall positive evaluation to the vote. It characterises media landscape in Slovenia as pluralistic, notes a high level of trust in the integrity of electoral process observed throughout the "calm and uneventful" Election Day, and the professional management of the elections. But it notes that there is room for improvement in such areas as sealing of ballot boxes and identifying them, training members of election boards and participation of women as candidates.

It describes as "exemplary" the involvement of members of the State-recognised national minorities (Italian, Hungarian and Roma) in municipal decision-making processes and notes the on-going debate about the protection of rights of other national minorities which do not enjoy the State recognition, mainly the nationals of the former Yugoslavia (who outnumber the recognised national minorities) and a small German speaking community.

Report on the observation of the Cantonal Elections in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The report on the mission carried out from 4 to 8 October 2018 to observe the Cantonal Elections held on 7 October 2018 in the ten Cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the Brcko District.

According to the report, presented by Stewart DICKSON, Head of Delegation, the elections were held against the backdrop of a challenging economic situation and an increasing disillusion of the people with the political stalemate in the country where the political class is divided along ethnical lines. The election campaign took place in a polarised atmosphere and candidates competed in an unlevel playing field, especially in respect to the media often shifted in favour of incumbents.

The report underlines that the election Day was generally orderly and well prepared, with majority of the election administration members being able to manage the process sufficiently despite difficult conditions. However, inconsistencies were noted on how to cast the four different ballots, as well as with regards to the question of identifying the party affiliation of Precinct Election Commission members, and subsequent trading of these positions among political parties.

The Congress recommends that the elections of the Cantonal Assemblies should be held together with the local elections – and not with general elections, given the importance of the Cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and their role in the complicated structure of institutions at State level.

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. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Johan van den HOUT (Netherlands, SOC) Thematic Spokesperson on Children of the Congress, issued a statement on the "European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse", celebrated on 18 November each year stressing that the fight for the protection of children against abuse is a long-term battle. He urged to keep up the work started with the 1 in 5 campaign of the Council of Europe and drew attention to the Congress report on unaccompanied refugee children which notes that refugee children are in particular danger of abuse and trafficking, even when they reach "safe" countries. He underlined that in most of our member States it is the local and regional authorities who are in charge of education of children from pre-school onwards and are in the front line for dealing with these issues.

B. GENDER EQUALITY

The Congress will continue to contribute to the strategic objectives of the Council of Europe (adopted by the Committee of Ministers in March 2018) which are of relevance for local and regional politicians, also keeping in mind the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular SDG 5 (achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls),. The focus in the coming biennium will be on fighting sexism in politics at the local and regional level as well as gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.

Jelena DRENJANIN (Sweden, EPP/CEC), spokesperson for the Congress for Gender Equality, issued a statement on the International Women's Day, on 8 March 2019 calling for zero tolerance for sexism in political assemblies. She underlined that sexism is an obstacle to a balanced representation of men and women at all levels of governance. The Congress has been working for many years to promote women's participation in public life. This includes the establishment of quotas, a mechanism that Congress applies within its own delegations. It has also adopted several resolutions and recommendations on gender equality and the fight against violence against women.

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

The Congress participated in the conference against anti-Gypsyism held on 27 November in Vienna, as part of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The objective of this conference was to develop recommendations for a possible European framework for national strategies for Roma inclusion after 2020.

John WARMISHAM led a workshop on "How to strengthen the recognition and political will of decision-makers at local and regional level to fight anti-Gypsyism and to advance Roma inclusion". He presented the initiative to create national networks of mayors led by the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion of the Congress. He explained that such networks can "serve as platforms for the exchange of good practices and dialogue between mayors but also with Roma civil society" in order to allow for a better inclusion of Roma. The Congress spokesperson also invited the participating of local

and regional elected representatives to publicly condemn anti-Gypsyism by signing the Declaration against anti-Gypsyism launched by the Congress. The Declaration has been translated into 34 languages and it has so far been signed by 122 signatories from 34 European countries.

On 11 October 2018 the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion organised the first meeting of the Albanian network of mayors for Roma Inclusion in Tirana. Participants discussed in particular the issue of the right to housing and forced evictions, both from the point of view of the new Albanian legislation, adopted in 2018 with the support of the Council of Europe, and from the perspective of international law. The meeting brought together seven Albanian mayors and deputy mayors, officials from local authorities, members of the Roma Civil Society, NGOs, representatives of the Ministry of Finance and Economy and representatives of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. The mayors agreed to form a network of mayors for Roma Inclusion. Congress member Miranda Rira agreed to take over the practical management of the network until an official board is elected and a structure of the network is established. 11 Albanian municipalities signed the Declaration against anti-Gypsyism.

On 3 December 2018 the Alliance participated in the event “Discussing Roma Inclusion through local partnership” organised by the European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network ERGO in Brussels. Together with representatives from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the European Commission and local NGOs, the Alliance representative discussed ongoing problems and strategies and promoted the Declaration against anti-Gypsyism and the work of the Alliance.

On 26 February 2019 the Alliance organised the 2nd official meeting of its local network of mayors in Ukraine (called “the Ukrainian Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion”), which was launched in 2017. The meeting gathered 40 locally and regionally elected officials, parliamentarians and NGO representatives in Lviv, Ukraine. In the context of the attacks against Roma in 2018 in various Ukrainian cities, participants discussed potential measures that can be taken to prevent such acts from occurring at the local level: the engagement of public authorities, the implementation of strategies, and cooperation between national and local authorities. Participants also examined ways to combat stereotypes and shape the public discourse about Roma in Ukraine. 8 representatives recorded video statements in which they invite the public to go beyond stereotypes and fight anti-Gypsyism and anti-Roma hate speech.

During the 36th Congress Session from 2 – 4 April 2019, the video statements recorded during the Alliance meeting in Lviv were displayed for the first time. At the same time they were published online and are now available to the public.

On 9 April 2019, marking the International Roma Day, the video statements were displayed in the Ukrainian Parliament during a side event of the general session of the Ukrainian Parliament.

D. EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK (ELDW)

At its 35th Session in November 2018, the Congress adopted Resolution 430(2018) on “European Local Democracy Week (ELDW): a new momentum”. Result of the work carried out by the Congress Reflection Group on the ELDW reform, chaired by Spokesperson Gaye DOGANOGLU, the resolution established new modalities of this initiative, focusing on four main objectives: to allow for more flexibility in organising the Week by encouraging activities throughout the year; to foster an effective network for sharing good practices among participants; to extend the outreach of ELDW through greater engagement of young people and other potential actors; and to better reward innovative initiative. In the framework of this reform, the website was redesigned to offer an interactive platform for exchanges between participants.

At its meeting on 29 January 2019, the Congress Bureau appointed Byrony RUDKIN (United Kingdom, SOC) and Mihkel JUHKAMI (Estonia, PPE/CCE) as new Thematic Spokespersons on the ELDW.

The ELDW annual coordination meeting, chaired by Congress Vice-President Barbara TOCE (Italy, SOC), was held in Strasbourg on 19 February, with the participation of some 60 representatives of partner cities from different European countries. The participants evaluated the ELDW 2018 edition, presented their good practices and discussed the Week’s 2019 perspectives. The meeting also provided an opportunity to present to the participants the Week’s new modalities, following the adoption of the Congress resolution in November 2018, as well as the new ELDW website.

Based on the participants’ proposals, the Congress Bureau, at its meeting on 4 April 2019, approved the theme “Local democracy: building trust” as the biennial theme for the 2019-2020 editions.

E. WORLD FORUM OF DEMOCRACY

A Congress delegation led by the President of the Chamber of Regions, Gunn Marit HELGESEN, participated in the World Forum for Democracy 2018 from 19 to 21 November in Strasbourg, on the theme “Gender Equality: Whose Battle?”. The Forum focused on women’s public, political and economic participation and on combating violence against women in the wake of the #MeToo movement.

The Congress sponsored two thematic workshops (“LABs”): LAB 1 on “What if she runs? Better representation through higher female participation in elections”, with the participation of Dusica DAVIDOVIC (Serbia, SOC) and Bryony RUDKIN as discussants, examined three initiatives from Albania, India and Mexico, highlighting ways of bringing down structural barriers that hinder women from running in elections and participating in decision-making processes;

LAB 12 on “Participatory democracy: a necessary boost for women’s power?”, with the participation of Stewart DICKSON and Vice-President of the Assembly of the European Regions (AER) Nina BJÖRBY as discussants, explored the effectiveness of (e-) participatory tools and their impact on including women in decision making, and looked into the quality criteria needed for participatory democracy to succeed in representing diverse women’s voices in the long term. The participants discussed an initiative by the municipality of Messina (Italy) aimed at developing inclusive approaches involving women, young people and individuals at risk of exclusion; and an initiative by the City of Ghent (Belgium) to provide a platform for the voices of women of 150 different nationalities.

In addition, some 30 representatives from Ukrainian and Georgian local authorities took part in the Forum and held a workshop, on 22 November, on “Gender equality at local level: Encouraging participation and equal opportunities”. The participation of these two delegations was part of the Congress’ co-operation activities, in particular its project “Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level” currently being implemented in Ukraine.

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.

Every year the President of the Congress holds an exchange of views with the Committee of Ministers on the Congress political priorities

In his exchange of views on 28 November 2018, the Congress President stressed that corruption continues to pose a major threat to local and regional governance and democracy in Europe, and governments and parliaments at all levels urgently needed to address it effectively. He said the Congress would continue to focus its action on prevention - promoting higher ethical standards and better protection mechanisms at local and regional level, as well as transparency as one of the top priorities of his mandate.

He underlined that the Congress is and will continue to be the political body that implements the local and regional dimension of the Council of Europe’s missions and priorities and intended to remain a dynamic force within the Council of Europe, referring to the ongoing Congress reform process aimed at streamlining its functioning, strengthening its institutional identity and increasing its flexibility of action. In this perspective, the Congress will contribute to the reflection on the future of the Council of Europe to be conducted by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Helsinki in May 2019.

On 3 April the members of the Congress in session held an exchange of view with Jari PARTANEN, State Secretary of Transport and Communications of Finland, on behalf of the Finnish Presidency of the Committee of Ministers (see II. B. THE SESSION)

Twice a year, the Secretary General of the Congress also presents a communication to the Deputies in the Committee of Ministers on-going work, upcoming events, challenges and working conditions of the Congress and its secretariat.

In his communication on 17 October 2018, the Secretary General gave an update of the statutory work achieved since last presentation in April 2018 and explained the philosophy and aim of the reform that the Congress has undertaken since beginning 2018. He underlined that the Congress Bureau as a reaction to the challenging financial situation of the Council of Europe, decided to launch a reflection on the changes needed to secure institutional functioning of the Congress, its capacity to continue to deliver, to maintain outreach and to contribute thematically and that the Congress wanted to further strengthen its institutional role as second political Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The activity programme of the Congress' three committees were communicated in the appendices of the activity report presented on this occasion

[Activity report CG34\(2018\)24](#)

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 PACE Liliane MAURY PASQUIER addressed the Congress on 4 April 2019 during the 36th session. She underlined that the Congress had a very important contribution to make to the Council of Europe's thinking on its future (see II. B. THE SESSIONS).

The President also held a bilateral meeting with the President of the Congress to discuss increased cooperation with the Congress and subjects of common interest such as the situation in the Council of Europe, especially with the Russian delegation in PACE, and the latest elections in Turkey.

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 the Observation of Local and Regional Elections, Jos WIENEN and Stewart DICKSON.

Speaking the 116th session of the Venice Commission, on 19 October 2018, Leendert VERBEEK presented the Monitoring Committee's recent activities in the field of monitoring and election observation. The Chair shared in particular his concerns about local and regional democracy in Poland and in the Republic of Moldova (see III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY).

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.

Xavier CADORET represented the Congress in the meetings of the Bureau and Executive Committee of the North-South Centre, in Tunis on 19 October 2018.

On 20 and 21 October, he also represented the Congress during the first edition of the Franco-Tunisian Encounters of municipal elected representatives in Tunis, held on the initiative of the French Institute of Tunisia and the National Federation of Tunisian Cities (FNVT).

He addressed the session on the challenges and tools for elected women in the exercise of power at the local level stressing that the fight for a better participation of women in politics and gender equality must be a local matter. The Vice-President also spoke on the theme of participatory governance,

recalling the Congress tools in this area such as the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the European Local Democracy Week.

During the Franco-Tunisian Encounters, which were attended by Riadh MOUAKHAR, Tunisian Minister of Local Affairs and Environment and François BAROIN, President of the Association of Mayors of France, more than 300 Tunisian and French local elected representatives exchanged their experiences with regard to decentralisation, in order to respond to the challenges identified on the ground in Tunisia.

At the end of these Encounters, the very first network of elected women from France and Tunisia, "Women of Influence", was officially launched. In parallel, a municipal laboratory initiative "Lab'baladiya", aimed at meeting the support needs of Tunisian local authorities will begin its work in December 2018 and will propose, through six learning workshops between peers from both countries, to develop innovative solutions and new decentralised cooperation projects.

E. THE CONFERENCE OF INGOs

The Congress and the Conference of INGOs have a close cooperation particularly on thematic issues such as equality, youth participation, citizen participation and religion related issues.

Thomas ANDERSSON (Sweden, ILDG) is taking part in a joint working group set up by the Congress and the Conference of INGOs to revise the "Code of Good practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process", a document adopted in 2009 by the Conference and supported by the Congress. The revision aims to update the Code to respond to social and technological change in our societies, underlining notions of transparency, openness and accessibility, gender equality and non-discrimination as principles to civil participation alongside accountability and independence. A conceptual change is also intended, where cooperation between local authorities and NGOs is based on "co-creation" rather than "partnership". Good practice examples will be brought together in a Toolkit. The two entities are expected to adopt the final document during their respective Autumn sessions in 2019.

During the 36th session, the President of the Congress met with the President of the conference Anna RURKA to discuss current challenges and further areas of cooperation. Mrs RURKA informed the Congress President that one of the two annual general meetings of the conference would now take place during the week of one of the two annual Congress sessions in order to develop better knowledge and understanding between the members of the Congress and the representatives of civil society.

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 both at political and at secretarial level.

High level group meeting

On 29 January 2019, the Congress and the European Committee of the Regions of the EU (CoR) held their annual High-Level Group meeting in Paris. The Congress was represented by its President, the President of the Chamber of Regions and the President of the Chamber of Local Authorities. The CoR delegation included its President Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ (Belgium) and Luc van DEN BRANDE (Belgium) on behalf of the CoR CIVEX Commission. The participants took stock of the current co-operation between the two institutions and discussed the common priorities for 2019. They expressed concern about the consequences of the current situation in Europe for local and regional democracy, pointing to the pressure faced by local elected representatives, and stressed the need for greater advocacy vis-à-vis national governments of the added value of decentralisation and of the role of local and regional elected representatives in upholding the social fabric of communities.

Presidents KNAPE and LAMBERTZ underlined the importance of bringing together the impact of both the Congress and the Committee of the Regions, noting in this regard the acquis of the Congress in monitoring the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. They also stressed the positive cooperation between the two bodies in the framework of the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities of the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM); the CoR Task Force on Ukraine and Working Group on Western Balkans; and the

Congress Reflection Group on the situation in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other issues discussed included the situation of local democracy in Turkey and possible co-operation in support of decentralisation in Belarus, Tunisia and Morocco.

At the end of the meeting, the Group agreed to use the occasion of the 25th anniversary of both institutions in 2019 to organise a Congress/CoR joint event in Brussels on 27 June 2019.

CORLEAP, ARLEM, TASK FORCE UKRAINE

On 12 November 2018, the second Forum on Local Democracy in Armenia was organised in Yerevan jointly by the Congress, CORLEAP, the Armenian Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development (MTAD), the Swiss Development Co-operation Agency (SDC) and the Communities Association of Armenia (CAA). The Forum provided a platform for constructive dialogue on decentralisation and local economic development among its 120 participants, including mayors and local councillors, their associations, representatives of the national government as well as international agencies and experts.

On 28 March 2019, also in Yerevan, Thomas ANDERSSON participated in a thematic conference on "Local Authorities and Civil Society Organisations", co-organised by the Congress, CORLEAP, MTAD and CAA in conjunction with the CORLEAP Bureau meeting. The event brought together representatives of local and regional governments from Armenia and across Europe, as well as Armenian civil society organisations and government agencies, to discuss the interlinks between local authorities and civil society and explore co-operation tools for creating an enabling environment for citizen participation. Thomas ANDERSSON presented in particular the work on the Code for civil participation in political decision making, currently being revised by the Congress and the Council of Europe's Conference of International NGOs.

On 27 February 2019, Xavier CADORET participated in the 10th plenary session of ARLEM, in Seville, Spain. He presented in particular the Congress' work on good governance and stressed close relations with elected representatives in the southern Mediterranean in the framework of its South-Med Partnership.

On 13 February 2019, the Congress Secretary General contributed to the meeting of the CoR Task Force on Ukraine, in Brussels. He underlined the Congress continued support to building stronger institutions at local level in Ukraine in order to make the decentralisation process a success and render it irreversible. The Secretary General also highlighted the complementarity of the work of the Council of Europe and of the European Union in supporting the Ukrainian government, parliament, regions and municipalities.

B. EUROPEAN ASSOCIATIONS

Assembly of European Regions (AER)

On 22 November 2018, Yoomi RENSTRÖM (Sweden, SOC), Congress rapporteur on migration, represented the Congress in the debate on migration, diversity and integration organised by the Assembly of European Regions (AER) in Nijmegen, Netherlands, in conjunction with the AER Bureau meeting. She stressed that local and regional authorities are the first "port of call" for migrants and key actors in the organisation of their reception and integration into the host communities, and encouraged initiatives aimed at giving migrants access to basic information with regard to the host community and society, facilitating language learning, engaging them in local activities and preparing them for the labour market.

Leen VERBEERK contributed to the conference on "International Migrants Day: Promoting Diversity in the Regions", organised by AER on 18 December 2018 in Barcelona, Spain. He recalled the Congress proposals for achieving successful reception and integration of migrants and called for a positive view of migrants who can enrich our cultures and energise our societies.

Conference of Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe (CALRE)

On 22 November 2018, the Congress Secretary General participated in the General Assembly of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE) in Horta Azores (Portugal), followed by the first Transatlantic Parliamentary Forum. The General Assembly elected Donatella PORZI (Italy), President of the Legislative Assembly of Umbria, CALRE President for a one-year term.

The Secretary General presented the work of the Congress on monitoring the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in the countries represented in CALRE and information on monitoring visits planned in 2019 and 2020 to Austria, Germany, Portugal, Belgium and in the United-Kingdom. He also invited CALRE members to disseminate Congress recommendations in their respective assemblies.

During the 36th Session, CALRE President Donatella PORZI participated in the debate in the Chamber of Regions on “Open Government at regional level” (see II. C. CHAMBER OF REGIONS). She also met with Congress President KNAPE and Vice-President HELGESEN to discuss possible synergies in favour of regional authorities.

C. NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Annual General Meeting of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities (Nicosia, Cyprus, 27 November 2018)

In his speech, the Congress Secretary General underlined that national associations of local and regional authorities are key partners with whom the Congress is in constant dialogue and welcomed the “Year of local self-government reform 2019” in Cyprus. In this context, he referred to the latest Congress monitoring report on the situation of local democracy in Cyprus of 2016 and invited the national authorities to discuss the follow-up given to the Congress's recommendations and to make best use of them in the final phase of drafting the legislation governing the reform.

Annual conference of the Central Union of Municipalities of Greece (KEDE) (Athens, 3 December 2018)

The President of the Congress participated in the annual conference in the presence of some 500 mayors and councillors the Greek Minister of the Interior, Alexis CHARITSIS, of Congress Vice-President Michalis ANGELOPOULOS, members of the Greek delegation in the Congress, and senior representatives of all the political parties in the parliament.

In his speech the President praised the work of the national delegations of local and regional authorities and of their national associations that make the Congress a lively, efficient and useful assembly, highlighting their crucial role in connecting local and regional authorities with national governments and parliaments.

The President welcomed the example of KEDE, which contributed to the implementation of the report on the situation of local and regional democracy in Greece, adopted in 2015. Indeed, the Greek authorities followed the Congress' recommendation by amending the legislation in July 2018 in order to extend the scope of the Charter to the regions. Highlighting the progress made in decentralisation, however, he referred to the difficulties faced by Greek local and regional authorities, including their low level of fiscal autonomy and lack of financial resources. In addition, in view of the difficulties currently facing Europe, the President of the Congress highlighted the central role of local authorities in restoring the confidence of citizens in democratic institutions.

Visit of a delegation from the Swedish association of Local Authorities and Regions at the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 12 March 2019)

The President of the Congress welcomed a delegation from the Center Party of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) upon their visit to the Council of Europe. During their exchange the President recalled that the Council of Europe's fundamental values, democracy, human Rights and rule of law, must be safeguarded and supported in order to maintain peace and stability over the continent. The delegation was headed by Carola GUNNARSON, head of the Center party group in SALAR and Lord Mayor of Sala (Sweden). A delegation from the SALAR board will also visit the Council of Europe on 21-22 May 2019.

Visit of a delegation of the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional authorities (Strasbourg, 18 March 2019)

Gunn Marit HELGESEN, also President of the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional authorities (KS), and the Secretary General of the Congress, met a delegation from the Association visiting the Council of Europe. The delegation was composed of representatives of several municipalities in the Hedmark and Oppland regions. They discussed the main activities of the Congress, in particular the monitoring of the implementation of the Charter of Local Self-Government in all Council of Europe

member states, as well as some thematic activities of the Congress such as the promotion of public ethics, citizen participation and human rights.

Norway is the largest contributor to Council of Europe co-operation programmes, providing almost 8 million € in 2017 and the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities is an important actor in promoting democracy and human rights at local level in several member states of the Council of Europe, such as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS

The Congress participated in a workshop on "Consultation mechanisms between local and national authorities", in Yerevan on 12 September 2018.

The Congress' co-operation activities support member States in implementing the recommendations adopted by the Congress to address the problems identified during the monitoring and post-monitoring of the Charter 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.

Principles and methodology

Since October 2012, more than 1200 local authorities (mayors, councillors and young local leaders) benefited from the Congress activities in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Those activities amount to more than 7 000 000 EUR, funded by voluntary contributions from member States and the European Union.

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, and advocacy support and legal advice. Thanks to an approach based on peer exchanges, Congress members and beneficiaries on the ground are enabled to debate on principles and standards of local democracy, and to share innovative practices of governance. Such peer exchanges are the Congress added-value; and as of today, more than 70 Congress members representing 25 Member States have taken part in peer work, in addition to the members from the respective national delegations of in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

The Congress does not promote a "one-size fits all" local self-government model. Its activities are designed to inspire mayors and councillors to lead the change in their municipalities, so as to strengthen transparency, accountability and citizen participation in their decision-making. In addition, the Congress supports them to commonly defend their interests vis-à-vis the national authorities, in close coordination with their associations.

The prevention of corruption is a central theme of the political and operational activities. It is based on a set of handbooks on transparency and citizen participation for local authorities in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine which result from previous project activities. The work in this field draws from the resolutions and recommendations on transparency and open government, resolving conflict of interest, fighting nepotism, protecting whistle-blowers, cutting the misuse of administrative resources, as well as on the European Code of Conduct for all Persons Involved in Local and Regional Governance, which is part of the Congress Roadmap of activities for preventing corruption and promoting public ethics at local and regional levels.

The right of local authorities to be consulted is also a core feature of projects, with regards to the new guidelines adopted by the Congress in November 2018. The activities are focused on empowering local and regional authorities and their association by equipping them with analytical skills which will enable them to defend the positions and advocate for the comprehensive legislative and institutional changes needed.

In addition, a stronger gender perspective was introduced in all Congress project activities to foster gender equality and promote women participation at local level. Raising awareness among local and regional elected representatives about the human rights dimension when carrying out their responsibilities represents another priority. This includes applying a human rights approach to the activities in the field and intensifying the work to support gender mainstreaming, as well as to ensure

the participation and inclusion of under-represented groups, especially Internally displaced persons, Roma and other minorities at local level.

The Congress secretariat is developing proposals for new bilateral projects in Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Belarus, as well as a project for Bosnia and Herzegovina with a specific focus on the situation in the City of Mostar, and projects on cross-cutting themes of interest for local authorities.

The Congress co-operation activities promote an intersectoral, institutional and multilevel engagement as a key approach to address the challenges and the needs of our modern societies. They directly contribute to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, elaborating on the wider Council of Europe contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – in particular to the achieving Sustainable Development Goals 5 (Gender Equality), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), and 17 (Partnership for the goals). Moreover, they contribute to the EU Eastern Partnership 20 deliverables for 2020, chiefly in the enhancement of the skills of local public administrations and in the prevention of corruption.

A. 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 30 June 2019, based on the overall progress achieved and the positive mid-term review.

In the current phase, the Congress supported the CAA Secretariat through on-the-job coaching of staff members responsible for advocacy, fundraising and communication. Further support was provided to the work of statutory bodies and thematic committees of the Association, in particular in strengthening their advocacy role, to represent and defend the interests of their members, local communities of Armenia. A number of documents such as a policy brief on the formalisation of consultation mechanism between the Government of Armenia, local authorities and the CAA, an analysis papers, legal opinions and recommendations to the Government on necessary legislative reforms related to local governance, opinion papers and policy briefs, were developed and submitted to the Government in the course of last several months.

During December 2018, the Congress supported the Association in the organisation of Forums of municipal councillors and civil servants respectively, creating a platform for the exchanges on the main challenges they face within the current local self-government system in Armenia. In March 2019, a workshop for municipal lawyers was organised to discuss and enhance their role in public policy shaping in the field of local self-government.

The assessment of the existing organisational capacities of the CAA vis-à-vis human resources and related policies was conducted with the aim to identify key strengths and define actions needed to successfully address main weaknesses, thus improve the overall performance and institutional capacity of the CAA Secretariat.

The CAA also improved its external communication and has finalised and published its first brochure with the aim of promoting its role to national and international stakeholders.

A new project “Strengthening decentralised governance in Armenia” was submitted for funding by the Government of Switzerland and is expected to be launched in July 2019, building on the results of the current project and expanding the scope to include amalgamated communities of Armenia. This project will build upon a two-fold approach: 1) to provide further support to the CAA in the execution of its mandate of catalysing and voicing the position of local authorities, as well as introducing a regular consultation mechanism between the national and local authorities and 2) to support local authorities in increasing their transparency and accountability and to apply participation mechanisms at local level.

B. GEORGIA

The Congress is committed to pursue greater co-operation with Georgia, and to building upon the achievements of the regional project “Strengthening institutional frameworks for local governance” (2015-2017) under the EU-CoE Partnership for Good Governance and the work on transparency, citizen participation and accountability.

Building on the commitments by the national associations of local authorities from Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine under the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2017, the opportunity of the World Forum for Democracy in Strasbourg was seized to invite Georgian representatives to a study visit and to a joint workshop with Ukrainian representatives on “Gender equality at local level: Fostering participation and equal opportunities”. During this peer exchange, organised in Strasbourg on 22 November 2018, the goal of gender equality as a shared battle, requiring the involvement of men and women, the media and all levels of government was central to discussions and sharing of experience on the implementation of gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive policies at local level (see IV. E. WORLD FORUM OF DEMOCRACY)

C. UKRAINE

The project “Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine”¹ is implemented within the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021. Launched in July 2018, it is based on the needs and feedback expressed by beneficiaries throughout the Congress activities in that country from 2014 to 2017. It builds upon the results of the project “Promoting local democracy in Ukraine” (2015-2017), which aimed to improve the implementation of democratic principles by enhancing the institutional and leadership capacities of local elected representatives (mayors and local councillors).²

The project aims to improve the quality of local democracy by strengthening institutional frameworks and by supporting local authorities and their national associations in their efforts to promote ethical decision-making and more citizen-oriented, inclusive, responsive and transparent local governance. The co-operation with the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) is being strengthened in this framework, based on the Memorandum of understanding signed with the Congress in September 2018.

Expert support was provided to the AUC to improve the quality of its outputs and advocacy capacity by translating the needs and challenges faced by local authorities into concrete and feasible legislative amendments. The AUC’s draft amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government – chiefly focused on the system of State supervision and control over local self-governments’ activities – and the Law on the Status of Local Councillors result from a wide consultative basis, which lends legitimacy to the AUC’s work and creates the necessary conditions for the establishment of a sustainable dialogue with national policy-makers. The Round table on the “Prospects on the status of local councillors” in Ukraine organised on 13 December 2018 in Kyiv enabled discussions on amendments to the electoral legislation and the legislative regulation of the legal status of local councillors, in light of the reforms which have enlarged their roles and responsibilities.

Consultation between the national and local and regional authorities represented by their national associations was enhanced through support by members of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, on provisions regulating accountability of local elected representatives to be included in new legal drafts which were discussed on 25 February 2019 in Kyiv.

The AUC is committed to and engaged in strengthening and developing its strategy and institutional capacities. Members of the association widely contributed to the baseline assessment of the AUC’s institutional position through several focus groups meetings organised in November 2018, and in meetings held with the members of the Management Board in January and February 2019. The findings of the assessment which was finalised in April 2019 will be discussed further by the decision-making bodies of the AUC to develop its mid-term strategy and orientate its development.

Joint work with the AUC has continued on open government and on gender equality. A study visit to the World Forum for Democracy in November 2018 in Strasbourg, was organised for Ukrainian local elected representatives and their national associations (see IV. E. WORLD FORUM OF DEMOCRACY) as well as a practical follow-up workshop on “Gender equality at local level: Fostering participation and equal opportunities” for Ukrainian and Georgian participants. They shared experiences and debated on the

¹ “Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine” – Project leaflet: <https://rm.coe.int/project-leaflet-ukraine-eng/16808ff88e>

² Finalised in December 2017, the project provided over 150 mayors and 200 local councillors, as well as 150 young local leaders, with an opportunity to acquire new skills and competences in applying principles and standards of local democracy to make their governance more open, inclusive, transparent and accountable to citizens. Furthermore, a strategic dialogue to support the process of reform was established through peer exchanges, with the contribution of high-level representatives of the Congress, including the President.

implementation of gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive policies at local level and on ways to implement open government principles and promote equal opportunities at local level.

Following their participation in the 5th Open Government Partnership Global Summit 2018, held in Georgia, Ukrainian mayors and representatives of the AUC initiated a discussion in autumn 2018 to widen the involvement of Ukrainian local authorities in the implementation of the Fourth National Action Plan of the OGP 2018-2020 and in the use of e-governance tools. They created a focus group within the AUC to ensure a stronger involvement of local authorities as fully-fledged partners.

During the workshop on “Open Government Partnership: opportunities for networking” and a round table “Open Government Partnership: A way forward to enhance local self-governance” held in Kyiv on 14 December 2018 and 29-30 January 2019, mayors and councilors showcased successful practices and reaffirmed their will to be engaged in the development and implementation of Ukraine’s national commitments to open government as fully-fledged partners with the ultimate goal of higher levels of transparency and enhancing the trust in local public institutions.

Approaches for accelerating gender equality through open government and gender-sensitive policymaking were discussed with representatives of 50 Ukrainian local authorities and peers from Serbia and Spain during the roundtable “Gender equality and open government for stronger local democracy” (14-15 March 2019, Kyiv) – an officially registered event of the Open Gov Week 2019-. Areas such as gender budgeting, fighting stereotypes and collecting gender-disaggregated data were identified as the main priorities for the realisation of gender equality action plans by the 20 Ukrainian municipalities signatories of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life.³

Voting rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Ukraine and the existing barriers for IDPs’ full participation in elections were addressed during the conference “Voting rights of IDPs at local level in Ukraine: Strengthening integration and grassroots democracy” (27 February 2019, Kyiv), with the participation of members of national electoral commissions from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Ukraine, and representatives of the Government and the Parliament of Ukraine. The conference was followed by the workshop “Ensuring better inclusion and integration of IDPs at local level in Ukraine” (28 February 2019, Kyiv), in which Ukrainian local authorities highlighted their role in guaranteeing the political, economic and social rights of IDPs, and expressed their readiness to support and advocate, through the AUC, the necessary legislative and policy changes for an effective integration and protection of the rights of IDPs.

D. SOUTH MED PARTNERSHIP

Morocco

During its 36th Session, the Congress, on 2 April, granted Morocco the status of Partner for Local Democracy, thus allowing the first delegation of Moroccan local and regional elected representatives to participate in the Session. On this occasion, a debate was held on 3 April on co-operation with the Kingdom of Morocco and the Partnership for Local Democracy, introduced by the two Thematic Spokespersons on the South-Mediterranean Partnership, Piero FASSINO and Constance DE PELICHY (France, EPP/CCE) (see APPENDIX 5)

The delegation had several bilateral meetings, in particular with the Council of Europe Deputy Secretary General, the Congress President, the Presidents of the Chambers and the Heads of the Congress Political Groups.

Tunisia

On 21 October 2018, Xavier CADORET participated in the first edition of the Franco-Tunisian Encounters of municipal elected representatives in Tunis, held on the initiative of the French Institute of Tunisia and the National Federation of Tunisian Cities (FNVT), where he contributed to a session on the challenges and tools for elected women in the exercise of power at the local level.

On 14 November 2018, Constance de PELICHY, Carla DEJONGHE and Valérie HAYER (France, ILDG) participated in the mid-term conference of the project ‘Participation of women for the

³ As many as 20 Ukrainian municipalities has signed the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life in only one year, and 30 more has expressed their strong willingness to do so in the coming months, which a strong and growing commitment from Ukrainian municipalities towards gender equality.

advancement and innovation of Tunisia', organised by the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) together with the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) and the 'Coalition for Women of Tunisia'. The event, which gathered experts and women elected in the May 2018 municipal elections in Tunisia, focused on the participation of women in local governance and gender mainstreaming in public policies, providing a platform for exchange among Tunisian locally elected women and their European counterparts. Congress members and the secretariat also held direct exchanges with women municipal councillors of the City of Tunis and its newly elected Mayor, the first woman elected to this office.

On 8 December 2018, Xavier CADORET contributed to the first General Assembly of the FNVT held in Mahdia, which brought together about 350 Tunisian mayors, government ministers, as well as experts from international and non-governmental organisations. He highlighted the role and importance of associations of local authorities and stressed the need of drafting the FNVT's statutes from a Tunisian perspective.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: 35TH SESSION (6 – 8 NOVEMBER 2018): AGENDA, SUMMARY OF REPORTS, LIST OF RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS AND ELECTION OF A NEW LEADERSHIP FOR THE CONGRESS

I. Agenda

<https://rm.coe.int/draft-agenda-35th-session-/16808b2bc6>

II. Summary of reports

<http://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016808ea978&format=native>

III. List of Resolutions and Recommendations adopted

Resolutions:

- RESOLUTION 429 (2018) / 6 November 2018

Verification of new members' credentials and new appointment procedures – Bureau of the Congress - Co-rapporteurs: Michail ANGELOPOULOS, Greece (L, EPP/CCE) and Eunice CAMPBELL-CLARK, United Kingdom (R, SOC).

- RESOLUTION 430 (2018) / 6 November 2018

European Local Democracy Week (ELDW): a new momentum – Rapporteurs: Gaye DOGANOGLU, Turkey (L, EPP/CCE), Congress Spokesperson on the European Local Democracy Week

- RESOLUTION 431 (2018) / 6 November 2018

Voting rights at local level as an element of successful long-term integration of migrants and IDPs in Europe's municipalities and regions - Rapporteur: Jos WIENEN, Netherlands (EPP/CCE, L).

- RESOLUTION 432 (2018) / 6 November 2018

Border regions facing the migration phenomenon - Chamber of Regions - Rapporteur: Eirini DOUROU, Greece (R, SOC).

- RESOLUTION 433 (2018) / 7 November 2018

European Code of Conduct for all Persons Involved in Local and Regional Governance - rapporteur: Manuela BORA, Italy (R, SOC).

- RESOLUTION 434 (2018) / 7 November 2018

Conflicts of interest at local and regional level - Rapporteur: Peter JOHN, United Kingdom (L, SOC).

- RESOLUTION 435 (2018) / 7 November 2018

Transparency and open government – Rapporteur: Andreas GALSTER, Germany (L, EPP/CCE).

- RESOLUTION 436 (2018) / 7 November 2018

A Code of Conduct for Congress members – revision of the Congress Rules and Procedures - co-rapporteurs: Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC), et Marc COOLS, Belgium (L, ILDG).

- RESOLUTION 437 (2018) / 8 November 2018

The consultation of local authorities by higher levels of government - Rapporteur: Anders KNAPE, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE).

- RESOLUTION 438 / 8 November 2018

Coping with the debt burden: local authorities in financial difficulty - Rapporteur: Heather McVEY, United Kingdom (L, SOC).

Recommendations

- RECOMMENDATION 419 (2018) / 6 November 2018

Voting rights at local level as an element of successful long-term integration of migrants and IDPs in Europe's municipalities and regions - Rapporteur: Jos WIENEN, Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE).

- RECOMMENDATION 420 (2018) / 7 November 2018

Local democracy in Lithuania - Chamber of Local Authorities – Rapporteurs: Artur TORRES PEREIRA, Portugal (L, EPP/CCE) and Sigurdur Bjorn BLONDAL, Iceland (R, ILDG).

- RECOMMENDATION 421 (2018) / 7 November 2018

Local democracy in Slovenia - Chamber of Local Authorities – Rapporteurs: Henrik Brade JOHANSEN, Denmark (L, ILDG) and Gaye DOGANOGLU, Turkey (L, EPP/CCE).

- RECOMMENDATION 422 (2018) / 7 November 2018

Border regions facing the migration phenomenon - Chamber of Regions - Rapporteur: Eirini DOUROU, Greece (R, SOC).

- RECOMMENDATION 423 (2018) / 7 November 2018

Conflicts of interest at local and regional level - Rapporteur: Peter JOHN, United Kingdom (L, SOC).

- RECOMMENDATION 424 (2018) / 7 November 2018

Transparency and open government - Rapporteur Andreas GALSTER, Germany (L, EPP/CCE).

- RECOMMENDATION 425 (2018) / 7 November 2018

Revision of the Congress Charter: proposals for a sustainable future - Co-rapporteurs: Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC), and Marc COOLS, Belgium (L, ILDG).

- RECOMMENDATION 426 (2018) / 7 November 2018

Local and regional democracy in Georgia – Co-rapporteurs: Michail ANGELOPOULOS, Greece (L, EPP/CCE), and Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG).

- RECOMMENDATION 427 (2018) / 8 November 2018

Coping with the debt burden: local authorities in financial difficulty - rapporteur: Heather McVEY, United Kingdom (L, SOC).

IV. Communication of the outgoing President of the Congress, Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM (6 November 2018)

Dear colleagues,

My mandate as President of the Congress ends today and I am pleased to address you one last time to take stock of these two exciting years.

It is true that a two-year term passes quickly. The role of the President is primarily to facilitate the work of the Bureau and the Session and to promote exchanges between members in order to achieve results in a cooperative spirit and atmosphere. This is an important part of the job, which I gladly carried out because I am deeply convinced that dialogue and exchange are the keys to success.

The role of the President is to ensure the quality of the work and the exchanges held. It is not always easy to communicate and to understand each other in an assembly made up of 47 national traditions and cultures, but the most important thing is that everyone feels listened to and that political debates are conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect. This is what I have tried to do and I think we did achieve a real quality of listening and debate.

Another aspect of the post is to convey the political message of the Congress following and building upon those of previous Presidents. It is precisely this continuity that guarantees the proper

functioning of our Assembly. The policy we have been following for ten years is to focus on where our competences lie, our core business if you will. We strive to concentrate on what we know and where we know we can achieve results. It is this pragmatic policy that I have defended with all of my interlocutors. I believe that the Committee of Ministers has appreciated this pragmatism and I want to take this opportunity to commend the support of our ambassadors, whose help is essential for the Congress.

It is this pragmatic policy that allows the Congress to contribute effectively to the local and regional dimension of the Council of Europe's activities.

I believe that the Congress is now widely recognised for its strategic and its operational contributions to the Organisation. This is due in particular to the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, our reference text. The Congress has set itself the goal of not only ensuring the implementation of the Charter, but also of making it a truly dynamic, living document that inspires territorial policies throughout Europe. Therefore, we also proudly celebrate the entry into force of the Charter 30 years ago, on 1 September 2018!

How have we obtained recognition of and respect for this text? By being present on the ground - for the monitoring of course, but also for the observation of local and regional elections and co-operation programmes. Admittedly, the Charter is not fully respected everywhere, but it has become a benchmark text and a goal to be reached for the member States. I am proud to have been able to contribute to this collective work.

I would like to dwell for a moment on the role of national associations of local and regional authorities, which are our key partners. I took care to maintain a permanent dialogue with them and to participate in their General Assemblies whenever possible. I have never forgotten that they are the ones that allow us to reach all of our communities directly. It is with them that we have the best chance to develop our work to improve our cities and the lives of our citizens. I want to thank them for the tremendous work they carry out and which only they can do in discussing and working with our national governments.

Finally, on a more personal note, as the first woman to be elected President of this Assembly, I have been keen to raise the profile of gender equality and the place of women in politics, in our communities and in international organisations.

In October, at the last session of the Parliamentary Assembly I took part in an event alongside the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Liliane Maury-Pasquier, and the Chair of the Committee of Ministers Marija Pejčinović Burić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of Croatia.

It is, I believe, the first time in the history of the Council of Europe that the chairmanship of the three political entities of the Organisation has been held by women. Things change, lines move! But we must continue to lead this fight for equality, and we must lead it together with men, because it is a fight that concerns us all.

I would like to share an anecdote with you: there was a poster hanging on the wall in my office here in the Council of Europe, with photos of every President of the Congress since the very beginning in 1957. They are all men, without exception. And then, just at the end of this long line of men, there is a picture of a woman, me!

My dear colleagues,

I will leave the Congress in a few weeks - I decided not to stand again for election in my region of Salzburg - but I would like to leave you with a message for the future, the future of this assembly: please ensure, and I am addressing all members of the Congress but also all the political groups, please ensure that this poster hanging in the office of the President shall, in the future, include the picture of just as many men as women. It is up to those of us who encourage women's involvement in politics everywhere in Europe to set an example by starting with our assembly.

My dear colleagues, this is not intended as a political legacy, it is, rather an invitation for our Congress to move towards a future where gender equality will no longer be just a promise but rather a commonplace reality of our daily lives. And I would wish that, in the future, it will be the norm to have a regular rotation between genders for the post of Congress President.

This is the message I want to leave you at the opening of this session. The Congress has been a true pioneer with regard to parity, it is now up to us to confirm this political will and to put it into practice.

I thank you for your support and for your never-failing dynamism in the service of our communities and our citizens.

V. Election of a new leadership for the Congress

During the 35th Session, the members elected the President of the Congress and of the presidents and vice-presidents of the chambers, as well as those of the chairs and vice-chairs of the committees.

Presidency of the Congress

Congress members have elected Anders KNAPE (Sweden, EPP/CCE) president of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, on 6 November 2018.

Chamber of Local Authorities

The members of the Chamber of Local Authorities have elected Xavier CADORET (France, SOC) president of the Chamber on 6 November 2018.

Chamber of the Regions

The members of the Chamber of Regions have re-elected Gunn Marit HELGESEN (Norway, EPP/CCE) president of the Chamber on 6 November 2018.

Monitoring Committee

The members of the Monitoring Committee re-elected Leendert VERBEEK (Netherlands, SOC) Chair of the Monitoring Committee and elected vice-chairs: Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, ILDG), Marie KAUFMANN (Czech Republic, EPP/CEE), Ludmila SFIRLOAGA (Romania, SOC), Vsevolod BELIKOV (Russian Federation, EPP/CCE) and Andrew LEADBETTER (United Kingdom, ECR).

Governance Committee

The members of the Governance Committee elected Robert GRUMAN (Romania, EPP/CCE) as Chair of the Committee.

Current Affairs Committee

The members of the Current Affairs Committee of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities met in Strasbourg, France, on 6 November 2018, during the 35th session of the Congress. Before moving on to the planned debates, the Committee elected its Chair (Gabriele NEFF, Germany, L/ILDG) and Vice-Chairs (Vincenzo NERO, Italy, R/EPP-CCE, Nawel RAFIK-ELMRINI, France, L/SOC), Andreas RABL, Austria, L/ILDG/, IIsur METSHIN, Russian Federation, L, ILDG and David SIMMONDS, United Kingdom, L/ECR).

APPENDIX 2: 36TH SESSION (2 – 4 APRIL 2019): AGENDA, SUMMARY OF REPORTS, LIST OF RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, RERUN OF ELECTION OF THE VICE-PRESIDENTS OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE, AND COMMUNICATIONS OF THE PRESIDENTS

I. Agenda

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168091ed73>

II. Summary of reports

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168093b54c>

III. List of Resolutions and Recommendations adopted

Resolutions

- RESOLUTION 439 (2019) / 2 April 2019

Verification of new members' credentials and new official procedures for appointing national delegations to the Congress - Co-rapporteurs: Michail ANGELOPOULOS, Greece (L, EPP/CCE) and Johan VAN DEN HOUT, Netherlands (R, SOC).

- RESOLUTION 440 (2019) / 2 April 2019

Request for Partner for Local Democracy status submitted by the Kingdom of Morocco – Rapporteur: Piero FASSINO, Italy (L, SOC), Congress Spokesperson on the South-Mediterranean Partnership.

- RESOLUTION 441 (2019) / 2 April 2019

Fighting nepotism within local and regional authorities - Rapporteur: Wilma DELISSEN VAN TONGERLO, Netherlands (L, ILDG).

- RESOLUTION 442 (2019) / 3 April 2019

Social rights of young people: the role of local and regional authorities - Co-rapporteurs: Liisa ANSALA, Finland (L, ILDG) and Piero FASSINO, Italy (L, SOC).

- RESOLUTION 443 (2019) / 3 April 2019

Financial compensation of local and regional elected representatives in the exercise of their office - Co-rapporteurs: Marta CAMPANARI-TALABER, Hungary (L, EPP/CCE) and Robert GRUMAN, Romania (R, EPP/CCE).

- RESOLUTION 444 (2019) / 3 April 2019

The protection of whistleblowers - Rapporteur: Josan MEIJERS, Netherlands (R, SOC).

Recommendations

- RECOMMENDATION 428 (2019) / 2 April 2019

Fighting nepotism within local and regional authorities - Rapporteur: Wilma DELISSEN VAN TONGERLO, Netherlands (L, ILDG).

- RECOMMENDATION 429 (2019) / 2 April 2019

The Congress' contribution to the reflection on the future of the Council of Europe (Helsinki Ministerial Session, 16-17 May 2019) - Co-rapporteurs: Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC) and Gunn Marit HELGESEN, Norway (R, EPP/CCE)

- RECOMMENDATION 430 (2019) / 2 April 2019

The budget and resources of the Congress for the next biennium (2020-2021) - Co-rapporteurs: Anna MAGYAR, Hungary (R, EPP/CCE) and Barbara TOCE, Italy (L, SOC).

- RECOMMENDATION 431 (2019) / 2 April 2019

Local and regional democracy in Poland - Co-rapporteurs: David BARO RIBA, Andorra (L, NR) and Pascal MANGIN, France (R, EPP/CCE).

- RECOMMENDATION 432 (2019) / 4 April 2019

Report on the elections of the Cantonal Assemblies in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (7 October 2018) - Chamber of Regions - Rapporteur: Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG).

- RECOMMENDATION 433 (2019) / 3 April 2019

Social rights of young people: the role of local and regional authorities - Co-rapporteurs: Liisa ANSALA, Finland (L, ILDG) and Piero FASSINO, Italy (L, SOC).

- RECOMMENDATION 434 (2019) / 3 April 2019

Financial compensation of local and regional elected representatives in the exercise of their office - co-rapporteurs: Marta CAMPANARI-TALABER, Hungary (L, EPP/CCE) and Robert GRUMAN, Romania (R, EPP/CCE).

- RECOMMENDATION 435 (2019) / 3 April 2019

The protection of whistleblowers - Rapporteur: Josan MEIJERS, Netherlands (R, SOC).

- RECOMMENDATION 436 (2019) / 4 April 2019

Local and regional democracy in the Republic of Moldova - Co-rapporteurs: Marc COOLS, Belgium (L, ILDG) and Gunn Marit HELGESEN, Norway (R, EPP/CCE).

IV. Rerun of election of the Vice-presidents of the Governance Committee (2 April 2019)

The Governance Committee of the Congress, meeting on 2 April 2019, elected the following vice-presidents:

Matija KOVAC, Serbia (R, EPP/CCE) as first vice-president;

Amelie TARSCHYS INGRE, Sweden (L, ILDG) as second vice-president;

Manuela BORA, Italy (R, SOC) as third vice-president;

Tamas Gergo SAMU, Hungary (L, NR) as fourth vice-president;

Robert SAUNDERS, United Kingdom (L, ECR) as fifth vice-president;

V. Communication of the President of the Congress, Anders KNAPE (2 April 2019)

The Congress is celebrating this year the 25th anniversary of its establishment within the Council of Europe. The first session of the Congress took place from 31 May to 3 June 1994.

There are four of us in the Congress today who witnessed that first plenary Session: Michel GUEGUAN (France), Jean-Pierre KLEIN (Luxembourg), Gaye DOGANOGLU (Turkey) and myself.

A joint celebration of this 25th anniversary will be held with the Committee of the Regions in Brussels on 27 June 2019 including a debate on the “development of democracy and good governance in Europe: monitoring devolution and regionalisation”.

The main objective of this celebration will be to demonstrate the possible synergies between the work of the Committee of the Regions and the Congress to further strengthen local democracy, to maintain the social fabric of societies and safeguard democracy, in a context where Euroscepticism and populism are on the rise, and where local and regional authorities are facing serious challenges.

The Council of Europe was a forerunner in integrating the local dimension very early on into its activities (first session of the Conference of Local Authorities in 1957).

Today, the Congress is the second political assembly of the Council of Europe and brings to the Organisation the second political dimension of democracy, which is democratic local self-government and regional democracy in a system of shared governance.

The position of the Council of Europe - and of the Congress within the Organisation - is in danger because of the political and financial crisis it faces.

Situation in the Council of Europe

Since last session, the situation has not improved and there have been no positive developments in the political crisis with Russia and the ongoing non-payment of budget contributions by Russia.

At the end of January 2019, Secretary General Jagland presented an update of the situation in his address to the Parliamentary Assembly. He will address the Congress on Thursday and I invite you to take this opportunity to discuss the current situation and the ways out of the crisis with him.

Mr Jagland noted that the deadlock with the Russian delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly had not led to the return of Crimea to Ukraine or improved the human rights situation in Russia. Instead, the deadlock had created a crisis within the Organisation.

He urged the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers to sit down and work concretely on clarifying the rules and the distribution of power between the two organs, in a way that will strengthen the authority of the Organisation, based on equal rights and equal obligations.

He underlined that the departure of Russia from the Council of Europe would hurt the Russian people most, because it would deprive them of protection under the Convention system.

This situation is a cause for concern to the whole Council of Europe including for us in the Congress.

We have always supported a political solution to the problem because we are convinced that Russia's place is in the Council of Europe, alongside all European States. This is also the message I gave to the Committee of Ministers during our exchange of views in November 2018.

The political crisis has also generated a significant financial problem for the Organisation.

After several serious reform steps and substantial cuts, the Organisation is now confronted with a "contingency plan" to respond to the missing €33 million per year, which the Russian Federation owes the Council of Europe.

This contingency plan is currently being discussed by the Committee of Ministers and will possibly be adopted in June or July 2019. I fear that all parts of the Council of Europe will have to contribute to the cuts in 2019 and even more so in the Organisation's budget for 2020 and 2021.

This Plan will certainly affect the Organisation's ability to implement some of the policies in the defence of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, for which it was created 70 years ago.

Consequences for the Congress

This political and financial crisis in the Council of Europe is challenging for the Organisation as a whole but also for each of its individual entities including the Congress

As the discussion on the contingency plan advances in the Committee of Ministers we will know more precisely what new cuts will be imposed on us. We discussed this in the Bureau meeting yesterday and will have an in-depth exchange in our next meeting. We will have to review the priorities which the Congress adopted for 2017 – 2020 and the priorities for the new mandate starting in October 2020 will also have to take into account the difficult situation.

We will hold a debate on the budget of the Congress this afternoon and the draft recommendation that will be submitted for your adoption clearly sets out the challenges that are ahead of us.

For several years now, and even more so since the beginning of this crisis, we have been constantly asked to do more with fewer resources. The Congress has contributed more than proportionally to the cuts in the Organisation.

Our repeated requests to increase the Congress' share of the Council of Europe's budget to 3 % have so far not been heard - the percentage granted to the Congress is now at a historical low of 2.52%

Yet the expectations concerning the Congress' work continue to be higher than ever and we have continued to review our working methods and achieved efficiency savings

The new language regime we adopted at the end of 2018 is one of the measures we have taken to face the budgetary constraints.

We have also been obliged to cut several activities (Summit of Mayors against radicalisation, for example)

We must draw the attention of the Committee of Ministers to the fact that this development is not sustainable in the long run if we want to maintain the quality and scope of our statutory work

I invite you all to pass this message on to your national authorities

Tomorrow we have an exchange of views with the Finnish Chair of the Committee of Ministers and we must take this opportunity to express our concern and ask for the Committee of Ministers' support

Congress Contribution to the Ministerial meeting in Helsinki

In this difficult context, the Finnish Chairmanship will host the next meeting of the Committee of Ministers in Helsinki on 16 and 17 May to discuss the future of the Council of Europe

During the last session, in November, the Croatian Chair of the Committee of Ministers Mrs PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ invited the Congress to contribute to this reflection

Our colleagues Gunn Marit HELGESEN, and Xavier CADORET have prepared a draft contribution which we will debate this afternoon and I would like to thank them for their excellent work

The Helsinki meeting will be crucial for the future of the Organisation and the future of the Congress within the Council of Europe.

Our contribution aims at alerting the governments of the crucial role that the local and regional level plays in supporting the European model of democracy and the European model of society.

Central States must recognise local democracy as an essential pillar of democracy and use the local level for democratic renewal of the system.

The Congress is a key element within the Council of Europe, in responding to the challenges facing the Organisation and the political challenges facing many member States.

The Congress is strong in its achievements and in the experience accumulated over decades of promoting local democracy in Europe with its monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government.

The Congress is ready to contribute to the demand for democratic renewal across our societies.

This is the message that our contribution must pass to the ministers in Helsinki

Dear members,

Difficult times and many challenges ahead in the Council of Europe and its member States

The Congress has taken the lead in reforming its working methods and identifying possible savings to meet the crises within the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is more important than ever, with its institutional experience, to restore social bonds and the legitimacy of democratic debate.

The Congress is an essential part of this process – it represents local elected representatives who are a direct link between public institutions and citizens - can contribute to finding solutions and help restore genuine democracy

We must convince the central governments and the Ministers present in Helsinki that we have a crucial role to play within the Council of Europe and beyond in the member States to safeguard democracy and defend Human Rights and the Rule of Law.

VI. Communication of the President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, Xavier CADORET (3 April 2019)

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

Welcome to our meeting! We have a busy session today, so I will begin without delay and be brief. We have some good invited speakers and I thank them all for coming. We have some interesting debates lined up for you.

Colleagues, we are here to work together to develop the quality of our democratic life at the local level, for the benefit of all our citizens. Difficulties are looming on the horizon, which we need to face with determination. Jean-Claude Frécon spoke in one of his speeches in this Chamber of “dark clouds gathering over the continent”. Many of our member States are facing threats to their democratic culture and institutions. At the same time, our Organisation, the Council of Europe, has its own challenges to deal with, with budget cuts, with the growing workload of the Court, the non-payment of contributions by a member State. All this is obliging us to tighten our belts, and even to scale down some of our activities, just as we need to be further developing our mission and addressing new challenges.

Today, we will have the third of our debates on “mayors under pressure”. We will hear speakers from Poland, Germany and a Congress colleague from the Netherlands during this last of our debates on this issue. But we are not abandoning this crucial topic, on the contrary!

I propose that we broaden the scope of this debate and begin working on a report about “working conditions of mayors and local elected representatives”. Our sister institution, the Parliamentary Assembly is preparing its own report on politicians who are prosecuted for statements made in the exercise of their mandate and we will work with them as closely as possible. We have an unprecedented number of local elected representatives in Europe who find themselves in detention, who have lost their freedom for carrying out their duties, and many more who have left office or been forced out of office for similar reasons. This is unacceptable.

However, we are not only thinking of extreme risks that can be associated with a political mandate. It is often about straight-forward questions such as: long working hours, stress factors, reconciliation of work and family life, pay, the legal implications of political responsibility and so on. All this makes it difficult in some municipalities to find suitable candidates for mayor or for the local council. This is what we want to talk about in the near future in this Chamber.

We have just one report on our agenda today, about the last local elections held in Slovenia. For this we welcome our rapporteur, Robert Gruman, from the Chamber of Regions, who is also Chair of the Governance Committee, a Committee that is working on a number of the issues that we will be discussing today.

Election observation is becoming a more and more important part of our activity, not because we are growing more interested in elections, but because, as democracy is finding itself more and more under threat, then the electoral process itself is coming more and more into the spotlight. When we began observing elections in a systematic manner, some 20 years ago, it was very much seen as an activity to help applicant States prepare for membership of the Council of Europe. We couldn't have anticipated that this would continue to grow in importance to the degree that it has.

I'm delighted that we will have a first debate today on the challenges of the rural-urban divide, another issue of immense importance, for which we have several good speakers. Our first speaker in this debate is from EURAC, a research institute in Bolzano, which will be working with us on this issue over the coming two years. I know that many of you are yourselves from rural areas and so are at the forefront of this problem, which is growing more serious by the day. Therefore, we've invited one of our members as a guest speaker, to share with us some of the problems that she has to cope with working in a remote region.

We're talking about our daily lives, the changing nature of our communities and also the growing inequality that we are facing with the relentless advance of the digital world. As we move, for example, to a cashless economy, printed currency and coins are becoming harder and harder to obtain in our villages and rural areas. And yet it is precisely these areas which depend the most on cash. And the people who are suffering most are precisely those who are the least mobile, those who don't drive, who don't own a car.

One of the priorities that I have set for my chairmanship is to work more closely with the Chamber of Regions. This may surprise you, since, for the majority of our activities, we work in 'plenary mode'. However, many of us have noticed that, when we go to our respective Chambers, we often find ourselves doing work that is of great interest to the colleagues in the other Chamber and that

we would benefit from more communication and sharing of our respective projects and work plans. The debate on the urban-rural interplay is one concrete example of thematic collaboration – a new report dedicated to the question of referendum at the grassroots' level will be another occasion for mutual exchange.

Ladies and gentlemen, I won't take more of your time. We are all looking forward to some lively debates and I urge all of you to speak up and share your experiences on these big issues. This is your Chamber, let us make the most of this opportunity!

VII. Communication of the President of the Chamber of Regions, Gunn Marit HELGESEN (3 April 2019)

Dear colleagues,

Yesterday, in the plenary session, we debated the Congress contribution to the Ministerial Session of the Committee of Ministers in Helsinki. We rightly laid stress on the challenges of the current situation in Europe and its impact on our societies – which is to say, on our local and regional communities.

But we have also stressed that these communities and their elected representatives – we, dear colleagues, our towns, cities and regions – can and must become the springboard for democratic renewal. The high level of trust that our citizens place in us gives strong hope for territorial democracy – democracy which is in proximity to citizens' needs and concerns.

It is clear that regions in Europe have a crucial role to play in the process of this renewal. But it also means that the questions that we are asking in our contribution for the Helsinki meeting, these questions equally apply to our regions – to us, elected politicians in regional councils, regional parliaments and regional governments.

These questions are:

- How can we restore the political link with citizens where it has been damaged – and citizens' trust where it has been lost?
- How can we safeguard democracy where it is being threatened?
- How can we repair the social fabric where it has come apart?
- Most importantly, the key question: "How to live together today?"

For the regional level, this means not only addressing the challenges of diversity and integration within our territories that are becoming increasingly multi-ethnic, multi-confessional and multilingual;

And not only responding to the challenges of migration phenomena, which we discussed in this Chamber on several occasions, most recently during the last session in November.

In a broader sense, this also means re-examining the relationship between the regional and national levels within a State, which is often coming under strain today.

We also have to address the relations between the regional and local levels within our territories – these, too, are being impacted by today's transformations; and of course, the relations among regions themselves – in many cases, the changes we are facing today have affected the traditional economic and social ties between regions within States and created new ties between regions beyond national borders. This development presents new opportunities but also new challenges.

Addressing these issues necessarily requires raising the key questions of citizens' trust in regional governance, of solidarity and of territorial cohesion – as crucial factors for regional development and for reaffirming the role and place of regions in European development overall.

Last year, we took up the question of upholding regional identity within a State – which is matter of great importance for "living together". Most members who took the floor stressed the need for respecting the constitutional framework – but also the need for better dialogue between the region and the State, and a better redistribution of resources between regions.

This debate, but also the current situation, clearly show the importance of having the region's voice heard today by the State and within the State. This means re-examining the existing mechanisms for dialogue and consultations – are they sufficient?

Is the territorial representation in the second chamber of Parliament enough, or do we need new forms, and new mechanisms, for regional representation and dialogue? I believe that this should be the subject of renewed discussion in our Chamber – and in our member States.

The dialogue between the region and the State is indeed crucial for the vitality of our democracies, especially at a time when the nationalist agenda and rhetoric are often built around the region and focus on regional identity as a catalyst for dissent. This dialogue is even more important for addressing legitimate concerns of regions.

Some of those concerns are rooted in the lack of territorial cohesion, which was the second problem raised during our debate in this Chamber. We took up this matter during our previous session in November, focusing on the need for improving mechanisms of financial equalisation – where the key role belongs to the State.

But equally important for territorial cohesion are relations between regions themselves – which, as I have said at the beginning, have been affected by the ongoing changes. It has been said on many occasions that inter-regional co-operation plays an important role in reducing regional disparities – and this is a subject matter that deserves our close attention. The experience of macro-regions could be of great use in this regard.

As a step in this direction, at our next session we hope to debate a report on cross-border taxation, and to discuss the role of inter-regional co-operation along so-called “cultural routes” in promoting traditional regional products and crafts, and cultural identity, to foster regional development.

But of course, citizens' confidence that their communities – territories where they live – will continue to be the sanctuaries that provide protection and opportunities for self-fulfilment, this confidence remains key for the success of any of our efforts.

Regions continue to be the crux of cultural references for our citizens, giving them reassurance in the face of today's global transformations. We must use this capital of trust to strengthen citizens' engagement in regional processes, involve them in making decisions on future regional development and indeed in co-designing regional governance together with them.

This is why at this session, we will be discussing the concept of Open Government – a range of measures, procedures and mechanisms to make regional government more transparent, inclusive and accountable.

Dear colleagues,

To conclude, and to sum up, I am convinced that what our regions need today is re-designing and renewing their relationships both with the State and between each other, as well as relationships with their local communities – as a way of becoming more accessible to citizens and more in touch with citizens' needs, in order to provide better public services.

Modern times also offer modern tools to help us achieve those objectives –

- the use of ‘mini-publics’ as part of Open Government to fine-tune priorities for community development;
- the use of digital tools for e-governance – and why not consider the concept of Smart Region after the concept of Smart City;
- or the use of the existing experience with intercultural models for defining common and unifying objectives for various cultural groups, to foster common regional identity and purpose.

As it was debated yesterday in the plenary session, this renewal must be based on a new socio-territorial pact with the State, to give a new momentum to territorial democracy and to regional development in particular.

Our task is to make sure that our regions fully contribute to this momentum of renewal.

Thank you

APPENDIX 3: THE CONGRESS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE REFLECTION ON THE FUTURE OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE (HELSINKI MINISTERIAL SESSION, 16-17 MAY 2019)

Co-rapporteurs: Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC) and Gunn Marit HELGESEN, Norway (R, EPP/CCE)

1. In 2017, the Congress celebrated 60 years of commitment to local and regional democracy within the Council of Europe. Today, representing more than 150,000 local and regional authorities in the Organisation's 47 member States, it is the embodiment of territorial democracy within the Council of Europe.
2. Since the first meeting in 1957 of the European Conference of Local and Regional Authorities, forerunner to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities which was established in 1994 following the Council of Europe Summit of Heads of State in Vienna, territorial issues have become a key concern for central governments.
3. Over this period of time, the Congress has continued to grow in political maturity and operational capacity, determined to be a full partner of the Committee of Ministers and of central governments in promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law at local and regional level, while with the main goal of strengthening trust in democratic institutions through proximity governance.
4. The Foreign Ministers of the 47 member States of the Council of Europe will meet in Helsinki on 16 and 17 May 2019 at a time when faith in the democratic process is faltering across Europe and the democratic values for which this Organisation stands face unprecedented challenges; the Congress fervently hopes that the conclusions and decisions of the Ministers will provide new impetus to the Council of Europe.
5. In this respect, the Congress is convinced that:
 - a. the Council of Europe, as the pan-European guarantor of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, is a central actor for innovative thinking in these domains and can contribute to the democratic dimension of Europe which is experiencing a worrying crisis;
 - b. the local and regional level can help significantly to reconnect with citizens and restore confidence in democratic processes and institutions and that the Congress can contribute its experience and that of the municipalities and regions it represents, in order to develop comprehensive strategies aimed at revitalising and regenerating European democracy.
6. The Congress, consequently, has prepared a contribution to the member States' reflection on the future of the Council of Europe, and:
 - a. invites the Committee of Ministers to take account of this contribution, presented as an appendix to this recommendation, during its preparation for the forthcoming Helsinki Ministerial Session and in particular during the drafting of its final declaration and conclusions;
 - b. declares its commitment and readiness to implement the conclusions of the Ministerial Session in its areas of competence.

APPENDIX

The Congress' contribution to the reflection on the future of the Council of Europe (Helsinki Ministerial Session, 16-17 May 2019)

Strengthening local and regional democracy in the 21st century

1. Since its foundation seventy years ago in the wake of the Second World War, the Council of Europe's main purpose has been to protect the people of its 47 member States, where human rights, democracy and the rule of law are recognised as the core values of harmonious co-existence.
2. In 70 years it has succeeded in creating a common space of legal norms based on these core values, establishing, notably, a unique system of human rights protection centred on the European Convention and Court of Human Rights. It has promoted a model of democratic governance at both national and local level that represents as much of a landmark feature of the European model as the human rights protection mechanism.

3. With regard to local democracy, it has played a key role in building pluralist and cohesive societies, which can be rightly seen as one of the Council of Europe's main achievements.

4. National governments themselves recognised this when, in the preamble to the European Charter of Local Self-Government, they defined local democracy as one of the main foundations of any democratic regime. This importance of communities and their elected representatives has become an acknowledged feature of the Council of Europe and provides today a valuable opportunity for the Organisation to make a positive contribution to the democratic debate taking place in our member countries.

5. The future of the Council of Europe is inseparable from the future of European democracy and the European model of society which this Organisation has built and upheld and which paved the way for the creation of the European Union (EU). Yet today, this model is in danger of unravelling. The protection it offers to Europeans is being challenged by far-reaching changes that affect, to varying degrees, all nations. The initial role of the Council of Europe, which is as relevant today as it was 70 years ago, is now being pursued in the context of a global transformation which concerns all societies and all aspects of people's lives, whether political, economic, social or cultural.

6. The tangible effects of global warming, and more generally the widespread perception that our environment is deteriorating as a result of human action, the onset of a serious decline in biodiversity, the struggle to cope with the increasing pace of technological change and its consequences on employment, the challenges of migration, the globalisation of our economies and its impact on our traditional cultural references are the "visible part" of this worldwide systemic shift.

7. These transformations affect the way we see the world around us and think about it. A number of our intellectual reference points are becoming less and less certain, leading to social anxiety and an evolution in our political perceptions, reflected more specifically in a crisis of representation that manifests itself in many European countries, in particular by the rise of anti-liberal tendencies, the return of authoritarian temptations, the resurgence of nationalism along with territorial aspirations for secession, and the emergence of a "clash" society in which confrontation is the norm, with new forms of individual and collective violence. Many of these phenomena have been observed during Congress monitoring and electoral observation missions.

8. For years prior to these developments, there has been a growing loss of public confidence in elections and in democratic institutions, which has resulted in increasingly worrying abstention rates and a rising number of votes for extreme parties, particularly the extreme right, and a widespread crisis of confidence in the media that has shaken our very conception of factual truth.

9. The European Union's Eurobarometer of November 2018 showed a fall in public confidence in the main national political institutions. More than 6 out of 10 EU citizens do not trust their government or parliament. As for political parties, 8 out of 10 EU citizens express their mistrust.

10. Although these analyses reveal a mixed picture in various European countries, they nevertheless show that in some of our democracies the political link between institutions and citizens has suffered considerably. A growing proportion of citizens do not feel that they are properly represented nor secure and voice their dissatisfaction with the national politicians.

11. Even before this crisis of political representation, we witnessed a weakening of intermediate bodies such as political parties, trade unions, professional associations and churches (until then seen as coherent, protective and inclusive micro-societies). The decline of these structures paved the way for a social divide between "Us" and "Them", separated by a political and social void that populist or radical movements seek to fill, offering simplistic responses to complex challenges while claiming to be new representatives of the people.

12. How can we restore the political link where it has been damaged? How can we safeguard democracy where it is being threatened? How can we repair the social fabric where it has come apart? This is the challenge of the transformations that are unfolding. All levels of governance are concerned by these questions:

- the Council of Europe, founded on the three pillars of the rule of law, democracy and human rights, which, together with other international organisations, cannot remain indifferent;
- the central governments of the member States that have to deal with these questions on a daily basis', and

- local and regional authorities, who are in permanent contact with the citizens and at the frontline of addressing citizens' concerns.

All levels clearly share these new challenges that we must meet by including in our political agenda the key question: "How to live together today?"

13. We, the members of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, are convinced that while responding to these challenges is a task falling primarily to central governments and multilateral organisations such as the Council of Europe, the response is also to be found at community level.

14. We also firmly believe that while this transformation may appear to be a systemic crisis having multiple dimensions, it is not a crisis that has no solution. With the right political will, the commitment of public institutions and the active involvement of societies and citizens, these negative changes can be reversed. A crisis is not the end, it represents a critical time in any process of transition to a new paradigm, and an opportunity for improvement which compels us to think about alternatives. The reflection about the future of the Council of Europe should be approached in this spirit.

15. Although our societies are complex and the global challenges serious, never before in human history have citizens had such a high level of information and freedom of opinion. A 16-year-old Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg, for example, inspires huge crowds across Europe to walk in support of climate issues. This youth has thus become a symbol of the collective awareness of climate change.

16. Our local communities – this close-knit network of entities on a human scale, often forged by centuries of history and culture – lost political visibility at the time when the idea of nationhood emerged in our political cultures. Today, given the various crises we are facing, local communities must become the focus of renewed interest.

17. In 1957 the Council of Europe, an intergovernmental organisation by nature, showed its political vision by creating its own conference of local authorities. The member States reaffirmed this vision 25 years ago when they transformed the conference into the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, with the task of strengthening the important role played by local and regional communities, their mayors and elected representatives, and of integrating their input into the Council of Europe's legal instruments and policies to create a space of common values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law at grassroots level.

18. Over decades, the Congress, as a unique pan-European platform for co-operation of local and regional authorities, has built a balanced mechanism of advancing local and regional democracy on our continent through monitoring the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in all the 47 member States, observing local and regional elections, recommending the necessary changes to governments, and sharing experiences of local and regional authorities to improve the governance of their communities.

19. Today, the Congress continues to foster dialogue between local and regional authorities and citizens and their greater involvement in decision making, including, among others, the participation of young people, of women and of the whole of civil society. Since its creation, it has supported a broader and more appropriate use of participatory democracy, through legally-regulated grassroots consultations. The Congress also pursues its fight against local corruption and all the other problems that too frequently tarnish the image of politics.

20. However, the grassroots level is not immune to the challenges and upheavals faced by our societies today, which are often aggravated by austerity measures that are affecting the ability of local authorities to serve their communities. Yet it is precisely to their elected representatives in towns, cities and regions that citizens first turn for response.

21. Local and regional authorities are indeed crucial for upholding a strong social fabric, and the increasing importance of the role of mayors in society is a political fact. Mayors, local and regional elected representatives, are at the frontline of major events in community life. This can be seen in the public responses to natural disasters, acts of terrorism and social crises such as in France, with the organisation of the "Great Debate" called for by President Macron in response to the Yellow Vest movement. Mayors and councillors are probably the only democratic elected representatives who can say without any contradiction that "the street is their office". The reactions to the appalling murder of the Mayor of Gdansk speak louder than any political analysis.

22. Mayors and councillors, as local elected officials, are the representatives of public authorities who are closest to citizens, the last line of defence against a more widespread rejection of political representation. The EU's 2018 Eurobarometer found that despite a general climate of mistrust in public affairs, there is a high level of trust (over 50%) in local elected representatives, well above the level of confidence in national governments and parliaments. It is even three times higher than the trust placed in political parties.

23. The confidence in local elected representatives goes hand in hand with the enhancement of the cultural dimension of the local context, which can be seen in the positive view of protected product designations, local distribution channels and the renewal of grassroots cultural identities. This is a powerful approach that may perhaps counterbalance the fears arising from globalisation. This newly favourable situation at local level can strengthen social cohesion at all levels.

24. Central governments can and must use the trust in mayors and our communities to rekindle democracy. There is a need to reassess the impact of the local level on citizens' participation in public institutions and the role of mayors and local elected representatives in building a European democracy. This is in the clear interest of decision makers at all levels of governance.

25. We, the members of the Congress, firmly believe that the current crisis is an opportunity to recognise local democracy as a central pillar of European democracy and to consider the territorial network of municipalities as an asset to ensure a strengthened democratic space, capable of re-establishing citizens' trust and confidence in the system of representative democracy and its actors.

26. The grassroots level is an ideal one for participatory democracy. It ensures a substantial degree of citizen participation in public affairs and decision-making. It provides an excellent platform for using innovative practices and tools such as digitalisation and open government to further strengthen democratic procedures. Local and regional communities are also key players in asserting cultural identity and implementing national policies as well as international covenants – such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030, the localisation of which is already underway in many countries. Cities and regions are also instrumental in putting into practice many Council of Europe conventions – dealing with a wide range of issues from landscape to the Social Charter to gender equality and the rights of minorities or children's rights – which serves to expand the Organisation's outreach beyond member States' central ministries.

27. As we mark the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe this year, we, the members of the Congress, are convinced that the future of this Organisation lies in strengthening further its role in ensuring democratic stability on our continent and protection of European citizens, and in developing its role as the pan-European mechanism for intergovernmental, inter-parliamentary and territorial co-operation. We believe that the challenges facing our societies today must be addressed by promoting and using the territorial dimension of European democracy based on a new socio-territorial pact.

28. We believe that the Council of Europe and its member States must invest in resilient local and regional communities. The tool for this is the Congress, which has at its disposal the legal framework of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the experience of monitoring its implementation. This framework needs to be strengthened further, as does the operational and budgetary capacity of the Congress. Thus, the members of the Congress call for a renewal of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in order to better meet the challenges and new opportunities arising from the Global Development Agenda (Sustainable Development Goals) and digitalisation.

29. Due to its dual nature as both an institution and a monitoring body, the Congress has accumulated a unique knowledge of local and regional experiences which represents a source of strength for the Council of Europe as a whole. More convinced than ever of the political superiority of representative democracy, we recognise the need for political innovation to enable greater citizen participation, starting with genuine innovation and experimentation at local and regional level.

30. The Council of Europe member States created the Congress to strengthen the local and regional dimension of European democracy. To fulfil its mandate, the Congress needs to be sufficiently funded with a share of at least 3% of the overall budget of the Council of Europe. Today, sustaining the European model of a balance of powers requires, as never before, greater reliance on grassroots democracy, a new socio-territorial pact. The Congress stands ready to be involved

in implementing these policies and to offer its knowledge of local and regional communities, its experience in solving problems at the grassroots and the tools at its disposal to help meet the challenges brought about by the changes in our societies.

APPENDIX 4: THE BUDGET AND RESOURCES OF THE CONGRESS FOR THE NEXT BIENNIUM (2020-2021)

Co-rapporteurs: Anna MAGYAR, Hungary (R, EPP/CCE) and Barbara TOCE, Italy (L, SOC).

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe,

1. reaffirming its role and institutional position within the Council of Europe as the voice of local and regional authorities from all 47 member States and the guardian of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ECLSG), and its responsibility for promoting and fostering the implementation of Council of Europe common standards for local self-government and regional democracy in Europe;
2. highlighting the fact that, with the ratification of the ECLSG by all 47 member States in 2014, the Congress' monitoring activities, which provide that every member State shall be monitored approximately every five years, have substantially increased;
3. referring to the regular exchanges of views between the Congress President and Secretary General with the Committee of Ministers;
4. stressing the appreciation expressed on these occasions for the results achieved by the Congress as well as the acknowledgement and understanding of the risks that further budget cuts would incur not only for its statutory activities but also for its post-monitoring, thematic and co-operation activities, which are tailored to member States' demands and interests;
5. underlining the fact that it has been obliged to cut its activities including those allowing it to address the challenges identified in Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland's annual reports on the situation of democracy, human rights and the rule of law;
6. highlighting its intention to review, in the advent of more favourable financial conditions, those cost-saving measures which have had an impact on its statutory activities, such as those related to interpretation;
7. drawing attention, in particular to:
 - a. its continued contribution – in a proportion that is higher than its share of the Ordinary Budget of the Council of Europe – to the Organisation's efficiency savings and cuts in its operational budget as well as in its human resources since 2010;
 - b. the cuts in the budget of the Congress in 2018 of 911 800€ (452 800 € for staff and 459 000€ for activities) that is 13.2 % of the initial 6 925 100€;
 - c. the additional cuts in the budget of the Congress examined by the Committee of Ministers for 2020-2021 in response to the non-payment by the Russian Federation of its obligatory contributions to the Ordinary Budget of the Council of Europe ("contingency plan");
 - d. the repeated requests of the Congress, never taken into account by the Committee of Ministers, for its share of the Council of Europe's budget to be increased to 3% in order to ensure a budgetary envelope which would enable the Congress to fully deliver with regard to the Council of Europe's priorities while this share has dropped since 2010 from 2.92% to 2.54%;
8. asks the Committee of Ministers to:
 - a. acknowledge the results achieved and the efforts made, in increasing the efficiency of the Congress in recent years despite a reduced budgetary allocation and significant restrictions in the human resources made available to it;
 - b. ensure, through its regular political dialogue with the Congress, consistency between the priorities identified by the Congress and its budgetary allocations in order to achieve critical mass and a real impact;
 - c. in light of the role and institutional position of the Congress within the Council of Europe, and taking due account of its continuous efforts (including its reforms of 2010, 2015 and 2018 and the introduction of a new language regime in 2019), decide to allocate an operational budget and human resources to the Congress for the next biennium 2020-2021 commensurate with and in acknowledgement of the requirements of its institutional functioning as well as of its statutory, institutional, monitoring, thematic and advisory tasks;

d. consider the Congress as a monitoring body, in view of the importance of local and regional authorities in contributing to the implementation of the values of the Council of Europe, and to reverse the downward trend, gradually returning to a share of 3% of the Ordinary Budget without which the Congress can simply not deliver what is expected of it;

e. consider how best to focus and concentrate all activities of the Council of Europe targeting local and regional authorities and their political representatives taking into account the political and operational capacities of the Congress and its secretariat;

f. invite the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to include in the draft programme and budget for the next biennium (2020-2021) a budget envelope for the Congress which will fully recognise its contribution to the Council of Europe priorities as a monitoring body and the pan-European promoter of territorial democracy, that encourages devolution and debates and exchanges of good practices among local and regional elected peers on our societies' major topical issues.

APPENDIX

2018-2019 budgets

1. The 2018 Congress budget was implemented up to 97.33%, showing that the financial resources allocated to the Congress are necessary and fully used. The scope for covering additional unforeseen activities or responding to political emergencies is very limited.

Budget outlook for 2020-2021 and beyond

2. The annual budget allocated to the Congress by the Committee of Ministers for 2018 was € 6,201,500 of which € 3,815,700 was for staff costs and € 2,385,800 for operational costs. The Congress budget, as a percentage of the total ordinary budget of the Council of Europe, decreased from 2.92% in 2010 to 2.54% in 2018 (see table below).

Evolution of human resources within the Congress Secretariat

YEAR	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
POSTS	42	41	39	37	37	37	37	37	37 ⁽¹⁾
POSITIONS	5	5	5	5	5	4	2	2	1
TOTAL	47	46	44	42	42	41	39	39	38

(1) of which 2 posts frozen.

Compared Evolution of the Congress and the Council of Europe Budget

YEAR	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 ⁽¹⁾	2019
CoE BUDGET	240 016 900	243 970 300	244 095 200	245 067 600	259 915 400	260 090 500	244 477 300	245 336 400
CONGRESS BUDGET	6 996 900	6 726 100	6 696 500	6 891 400	7 126 400	7 113 300	6 201 500	6 201 900
%	2,92	2,76	2,74	2,81	2,74	2,73	2,54	2,53

(1) Adjusted budget as a result of the cessation of Turkey's major contributor status.

APPENDIX 5: REQUEST FOR PARTNER FOR LOCAL DEMOCRACY STATUS SUBMITTED BY THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO

Resolution 440 (2019) / 2 April 2019

Rapporteur: Piero FASSINO, Italy (L, SOC), Congress Spokesperson on the South-Mediterranean Partnership.

The Congress:

1. Recalling its Resolution 376(2014) on the creation of the Partner for Local Democracy status in order to formalise relations between the Congress and the political authorities in the neighbouring countries, including the local and regional authorities and their representative associations;

2. Considering:

a. the formal request for the status of Partner for Local Democracy, addressed on 30 May 2018 to the President of the Congress by the Minister of the Interior of Morocco, the President of the AMPCC (Moroccan Association of Chairs of Municipal Councils) and the President of the ARM (Association of Regions of Morocco), in accordance with the procedure referred to in Rule 68 of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress;

b. the participation of Morocco in co-operation activities with the Council of Europe in the framework of the Neighbourhood Partnership since 2012;

c. the participation of Morocco in several Council of Europe conventions and partial agreements;

d. the granting of Partner for Democracy status to the Parliament of Morocco by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2011;

3. Decides:

a. to grant the Kingdom of Morocco the status of Partner for Local Democracy in accordance with the forms and conditions of participation referred to in Rule 68.9 of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress;

b. to allocate 6 representative and 6 substitute seats to the delegation from Morocco;

c. to invite Morocco to appoint a Partner for Local Democracy delegation to be composed in accordance with Rule 68.8 of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress;

d. that the provisions of this resolution shall come into force with immediate effect.

APPENDIX 6: STATEMENTS ON THE LOCAL ELECTIONS IN TURKEY

Congress Observation mission of the local elections in Turkey held on 31 March 2019

Statement by Andrew DAWSON (1 April 2019)

I believe it is appropriate that I commence my remarks by thanking the Turkish Authorities for inviting the Congress of the Council of Europe to observe the local elections held here yesterday.

The Council of Europe is conscious that Turkish election law does not include provisions covering election observation by international observers. Given that the Congress very much welcomed the invitation to observe these elections. We've also seen the invitation as proof of Turkey's continuing close co-operation with the Council of Europe. Turkey has been a member of the Council of Europe since 1950 - almost as long as the Council has existed.

I will turn first to the technical aspects of our mission; I will then make some broader comments based on our observations.

The Council of Europe's monitoring mission saw us deploy 22 observers from 20 different European countries. We were divided into 10 teams and were deployed throughout Turkey. We witnessed voting taking place in around 140 polling stations.

Prior to this deployment we held a series of meetings with many interlocutors in Ankara both immediately prior to Election Day and at an earlier preparatory mission visit in March.

I place on record both my, and the Council of Europe's thanks and gratitude to the people we met and for answering our many questions - some of which would have been testing and difficult.

We observed voting in various locations which included included Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Antalya, Adana, Erzurum and Diyarbakir. Our observations started before the polls opened, continued during voting and ended observing some of the counts being conducted by the Ballot Box Committees.

My team observed the elections in Ankara and some adjacent rural municipalities. I can say personally that in most locations our teams were positively welcomed and that I drank much tea and coffee during the day.

Apart from some isolated inconsistencies observed - for example, regarding the signing of the voters' lists and the sealing of the ballot boxes from what we saw the Ballot Box Committees performed their technical, procedural tasks competently. Congress observers have reported that they were given full access to the voting procedures, mostly in an open and friendly way.

Unfortunately, as many of you will already know Election Day was overshadowed by deaths. We extend our condolences to the families and friends of the deceased.

However, without in any way minimising the tragedy of those deaths it is appropriate for us to note that the elections were conducted in an orderly way.

We were very impressed by the great interest in these elections shown by the citizens. A turnout rate of 84% is a sign of healthy democratic interest and awareness. The voters had a broad choice of political parties, 13 in total. There were around 280,000 candidates for the different offices - mayors, councillors and mukhtars throughout the country. Some municipalities were heavily contested and brought tight races that is what democracy is all about! I was really struck by many of the contested mukhtar elections. From what I saw they were wonderfully "robust" but could do with being regulated.

We were very impressed by the technical proficiency of the election at all levels from the Supreme Election Council down to the individual Ballot Box Committees. The logistics involved in providing country-wide local government elections in country as large and diverse as Turkey are impressive.

The registration of some 350 voters per Ballot Box Committees makes voting smooth and counting faster but it does bring challenges. You need at least 4 people to run a Ballot Box Committee leaving aside observers. I estimate that more than 0.75 million people were involved in running these elections it could well have been much more than this.

We did see some crowded polling stations - ideally this should be avoided. However, we did note that Turkish procedures meant that it could take several minutes for a person to vote - once all the various checks and procedures had been carried out.

There were provisions in place in most polling stations we visited, to allow elderly and disabled people to use a ballot box at the ground floor. My team also spoke to one mobile ballot box committee.

We were told by the authorities that some 60,000 law enforcement officers were deployed to the regions, to ensure security on Election Day. Also, an impressive figure. At the same time, it seemed that there was a massive deployment of security forces in some places - we counted up to 25 police officers in one polling station and found policemen in each and every polling station, at least temporarily. I personally found it strange to see heavily armed Gendarmes both outside and inside a polling station. I am not used to seeing voting where there are automatic weapons very obviously on display. I must thank our security detail who were very professional and helpful - and even enjoyed British humour.

However, sound election administration and technical skills implementing the law are only parts of the overall picture that makes up the assessment of elections.

In order to assess elections as being genuinely democratic and in accordance with the Council of Europe principles of democracy, rule of law and human rights, it needs more:

It needs a political environment where there is genuine freedom of expression, where all citizens can express their opinions without fear. Citizens must be able to criticise and question those in power freely and without fear of reprisals or repression. This requires a media that genuinely offers plurality, and that is objectively fair to all political parties in all respects. It needs an atmosphere where media freedom is absolutely ensured. Where journalists can carry out their reporting and commentary without running the risk of being fired for making regime-critical reports or perhaps ending up in prison just for expressing their legal and legitimate views.

There should be equal access for all parties running in elections to the media. Voters need to be able to get a balanced picture of the contestants' programmes and objectives. An equal playing field for all is an absolute prerequisite for an election campaign to be called fair and free.

It also requires a fair and reasonable legal framework overseen by a robust judiciary - willing to uphold the rule of law without fear or favour.

That legal framework, and this is essential for us from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities must allow locally elected representatives to exercise their political mandate - freely and without fear of accusations and repressions for supposed terrorist connections.

It also requires that state resources are not used to favour one political party over another.

I must mention the role and participation of women in the democratic processes. We were disappointed not to see more women in charge of Ballot Box Committees and taking a leading role in politics more generally. However, we were pleased to see many younger women acting as observers - this is a positive sign for the future.

I acknowledge, and the Council of Europe acknowledges the security difficulties that Turkey faces. However, it is my view that when democracy is under threat the answer is not less democracy but more democracy.

We also note that Turkey's definition of terrorism is not consistent with Council of Europe standards, notably the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

With all this being said, I am afraid, we from the Congress of the Council of Europe are not fully convinced that Turkey currently has the free and fair electoral environment which is necessary for genuinely democratic elections in line with European values and principles.

But we do take the fact that many parties have been successful as a positive sign of Turkey's democratic resilience. Hope for the future is important for a country that is currently going through difficult times, not only politically but also economically.

I must mention the Kurdish question. This brings me to the Recommendation the Congress made in March 2017. That recommendation urged the Turkish authorities to restrict the measures on government appointing trustees and to restore the capacity of Municipal Councils to choose for themselves a suitable replacement mayor in cases where a mayor is removed or suspended from office.

We are not turning a blind eye to Turkey's absolute right and necessity to protect its integrity and security. We support and respect them in defending their state and their people. However, we do not accept assertions that assume every HDP mayor is or could be a terrorist or has terrorist connections. Please continue your policy of 'normalisation.'

We therefore call on the Turkish authorities to take the 31 March local elections as an opportunity to change course. The local representatives elected yesterday must be able to exercise their mandate freely and in accordance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government of the Congress of the

Council of Europe to which Turkey is a Party. This also means ensuring that each municipality has sufficient resources to carry out its functions.

These elections are a chance for the full reinstatement of the principle of direct democratic mandate in Turkey: please seize this opportunity.

Statement by the Bureau of the Congress (4 April 2019)

The Bureau of the Congress, meeting at the 36th Congress Plenary Session on 4 April issued a statement on the post-election situation in Turkey and in particular on the appeals and recount of votes currently being organised in several municipalities; and some of the comments made by the Turkish authorities on the Congress' observation mission

"We acknowledge the challenging or recounting of votes in the case of tight election results. Such challenges are rare and normally only involve a handful votes in very few places. When challenges are made relating to many thousands of votes in many places questions inevitably arise about the integrity of the entire election process.

"Given the news of these challenges, the Bureau of the Congress has decided to take the exceptional step of continuing its oversight of the Turkish local government elections whilst the results are being challenged.

"In order that such challenges command the confidence of the Turkish people and the Council of Europe we call on the Turkish authorities to ensure that the Supreme Election Board and the District Election Boards are able to carry out their work in an open and transparent manner. We expect their work to be fully in compliance with international norms and standards, free from any and all inappropriate political interference and consistent with the rule of law. Their work must be lawful, open and transparent and their adjudications fair reasonable and honest. The judges must be free to work without interference.

"In any Council of Europe state, it is the people that are sovereign. It is essential that they can vote in a reasonable and fair political climate and their political and democratic choices and decisions are fully respected.

"This means that, whenever the Congress observes an election, we are interested in far more than the organisation and mechanics of voting on the Election Day including the media landscape, the campaign and political environment and freedom of expression in general. This is enshrined in the Congress' rules and mandate.

"We look to Turkey to ensure that the adjudication of these electoral challenges will be conducted fairly and honestly fully in accordance with the rule of law and the democratic choices made by the Turkish people. »

Statement by Anders KNAPE, President of the Congress (12 April 2019)

Reacting to reports from Turkey about elected representatives in the south-east of the country not having been appointed mayors despite their victory in the 31 March local elections, Anders Knape, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, stressed the importance of the respect for the voter's decision.

"As stated by the Congress after the observation of the local elections, the democratic choices and decisions of the people, who are the sovereign in any Council of Europe state, have to be fully respected. The implementation of the will of the voter has absolute priority in democratic systems", Mr Knape stated.

"We call on the Turkish authorities to conclude the procedures for establishing the final results of the local elections in Istanbul as quickly as possible, and, more generally, to implement the decisions taken by the voters. The local representatives elected on 31 March must be able to exercise their mandate free and in accordance with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. This implies also appropriate resources and fair conditions for the newly elected mayors in the municipalities, regardless of the political party for which they were running", the Congress President concluded.