

## 48th SESSION

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## Congress Budget for 2026-2027

Bureau of the Congress

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1. L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions.  
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress.  
SOC/G/PD: Group of Socialists, Greens and Progressive Democrats.  
ILDG: Independent Liberal and Democratic Group.  
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group.  
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress.

## DRAFT RECOMMENDATION

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) refers to its institutional role as the voice of the local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe member States and as guardian of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122), which has been ratified by all member States, and reaffirms its responsibility for promoting and fostering the implementation of the Council of Europe's common standards at local and regional level.
2. It welcomes the results of the 4th Council of Europe Summit in Reykjavik and the joint declaration by the Heads of State and Government, recommitting themselves to protecting the democratic foundations of our societies, in particular through the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.
3. The Congress welcomes the decisive support given by the Heads of State and Government in this declaration to the essential role of multilevel governance in achieving the Organisation's vision.
4. It also welcomes the adoption of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy and the commitment made by the Heads of State and Government to guarantee and strengthen democracy and good governance at all levels throughout Europe.
5. The Congress notes with satisfaction the firm commitment of the Heads of State and Government to the system established under the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) as the cornerstone of the Council of Europe's protection of human rights. In this respect, it welcomes their consideration of the essential role played by local and regional authorities in the promotion and protection of human rights.
6. The Congress calls for local and regional authorities to be proactively involved in devising preventive and curative public policies to manage climate and environmental crises, since all major crises will ultimately have an impact on all levels of governance. In this context, it supports the work aimed at promoting the role of local and regional authorities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the areas of competence of the Congress.
7. It underlines the recognition by the Heads of State and Government that local authorities are among those responsible for implementing the Convention and complying with the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and welcomes their call on the Congress to strengthen political dialogue on the implementation of judgments.
8. It also refers to the call by the Heads of State and Government to intensify efforts, at all levels of governance, for the effective protection of the rights of Ukrainian children, in response to the consequences of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine.
9. The Congress reiterates its support for ongoing efforts to involve young people in decision-making processes by helping local authorities to improve their policy and practice in working with young people. It stresses the importance of securing future funding for the “Rejuvenating Politics” initiative, which each year offers one young person from each Member State the opportunity to participate actively in Congress sessions and in the work of its committees.
10. The Congress underlines the need to review its activities in the light of the decisions of the 4th Summit and new developments in priority areas such as human rights and the rule of law, while strengthening its statutory and cooperation activities and raising the profile of the Congress and strengthening its relations with its institutional partners.
11. The Congress welcomes the regular exchanges of views between the President and the Secretary General of the Congress and the Committee of Ministers, and the support and satisfaction expressed by the member States and the Committee of Ministers regarding the results achieved and the reforms undertaken by the Congress.
12. It recalls the successive budget cuts that the Congress has experienced over the years and the risks that further budget cuts could pose to its statutory, post-monitoring, thematic and co-operation activities, which have been tailored to the expectations and interests of the member States.

13. The Congress further highlights that it has been obliged to discontinue certain activities, in particular those enabling it to respond to the challenges identified in the Secretary General's annual reports on the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and to the priorities of successive Presidencies of the Committee of Ministers.

14. The Congress refers to the series of reforms it carried out in 2010, 2015, 2018 and 2019.

15. It welcomes the Committee of Ministers' decision to strengthen the Secretariat by transferring the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance to the Congress in 2024, as well as the budgetary reinforcements granted under the 2024-2025 budget.

16. It notes that this welcome consolidation is, however, not sufficient to cover the remaining gap between the resources available and the capacity needed to deliver the expected results.

17. The Congress welcomes and fully supports its Secretary General's proposals to increase the resources allocated to the Congress under the Council of Europe's 2026-2027 ordinary budget, in order to provide the Secretariat with human and financial resources commensurate with the institution's mandate and the development of its activities, particularly in the light of the strategic decisions of the 4th Summit.

18. In the light of the above, the Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers to:

a. confirm the confidence shown at the 4th Summit in local and regional authorities' role in promoting and protecting the values of the Council of Europe at the closest possible level to its citizens;

b. continue to invest in the Congress to enable it to implement the Reykjavik deliverables by strengthening its statutory and co-operation activities;

c. encourage member States to make voluntary contributions for concrete operational activities of the Congress and to make staff available to its Secretariat;

d. take into account the inflation adjustment for the next biennium in order to maintain the Council of Europe as a competent actor in the fields of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, so as to enable all its bodies and structures to act in the interest of the citizens of the 46 member States;

e. invite the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to grant the Congress, in the draft programme and budget for the 2026-2027 biennium, an increased budgetary allocation, as set out in the explanatory memorandum accompanying this recommendation (document CG(2025)48-09), and which is fully commensurate with the contribution of the Congress to the priorities of the Council of Europe as a monitoring body and pan-European body for the promotion of territorial democracy, encouraging decentralisation as well as debate and exchanges of good practice between local and regional elected representatives on the main topical issues of our societies.

## EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

## 1. Evolution of the number of permanent posts within the Congress Secretariat

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Posts	47	46	44	42	42	41	39	39	38	38	38	34	34	34	41

## 2. Proposed increase in the Congress staff and operational budgets for 2026-2027

## 2.1. Congress programmatic objectives for the 2024-2027 Programme and Budget and key deliverables

1. The programmatic focus and key deliverables proposed for the 2024-2027 programme take their origin in the Congress **recommendation to the 4th Summit** (Recommendation 492 (2023)) to recognise the crucial role of local and regional democracy in instilling democratic values, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and in involving citizens in democratic governance and decision making at local level.

2. With its mandate strengthened by the strategic decisions of the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government in May 2023, the Congress, as one of the political assemblies of the Council of Europe, continues to affirm and promote the essential role of local and regional authorities in consolidating and promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law, in accordance with the priorities of the Council of Europe.

3. Following the Reykjavik Summit, the Congress adopted Resolution 493 (2023) "Delivering on the Reykjavik summit: **revised Congress priorities, working procedures and structures**". on the implementation of its decisions, concerning the revision of the Congress' priorities, working procedures and structures. The Congress considered it necessary to align its priorities with the decisions of the Summit, with the strengthened monitoring of the Charter, the adoption of a human rights strategy, etc.

4. The programming and budgetary process was launched in parallel within the Congress Secretariat in 2023, with the proposal to increase budgetary and operational resources, which was made necessary by the strengthening and development of priority activities. In its **Recommendation 495 (2023)** "Congress Budget for 2024-2025", the Congress fully supported this proposal, which included the creation of **8 new posts** in the priority sectors, as well as an appropriate increase in the operational budget.

5. At the end of the budget negotiations and debate in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, a consensus-based, compromise budget was adopted for 2024-2025, with the Congress having obtained the creation of **4 posts** and the **requested increase** in the operational budget.

6. At the same time, the local democracy **co-operation** sector was consolidated by the transfer to the Congress, at the beginning of 2024, of the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance (CEGG), together with the staff (3 permanent posts financed from the ordinary budget), the budget for operational activities and the Centre's portfolio of co-operation projects, financed from extra-budgetary resources.

7. Thus, although the Congress did not obtain all of its initial request as regards staffing, it emerged stronger from this budgetary exercise, with its first increase in staff numbers for 10 years (a total of 7 more permanent posts, taking the number of posts financed by the regular budget from 34 to 41).

8. With this budgetary reinforcement and the internal restructuring of its Secretariat, in 2025 and for the 2026-2027 biennium, the Congress intends to **continue consolidating** its inherent statutory activities, **support the development** of its cooperation activities, and **accelerate** the deployment of its new activities in priority areas. In doing so, the Congress intends to **stay the course** on its main commitments made following the Reykjavik Summit in 2023, by continuing to carry out its main

activities, while making the **necessary adjustments** to meet the evolving needs of the member States in terms of **democracy** at all levels of governance as well as increased support for **Ukraine**.

9. In each of its fields of action, the Congress will focus on achieving tangible and convincing results, contributing to the fulfilment of its mission.

10. **Statutory meetings:** (sessions, bureaux and committees): given the constraint of only two sessions per year, and in order to increase the political responsiveness of the Congress (thematic debates / adoption of texts), to make more systematic use of statutory forums (notably online where appropriate, with the aim of achieving efficiency gains).

11. **Monitoring:** in response to the growing need to monitor the state of local and regional democracy, to ensure that each country is monitored every 6 years and to obtain ratification of the Additional Protocol to the Charter by all member States, as well as the lifting of reservations to the Charter wherever possible; to continue to produce the periodic report on the recurring issues raised by the Charter; to carry out more post-monitoring and pre-election missions; to respond efficiently to the various needs for collaboration expressed by other sectors of the Council in their missions at local level.

12. **Election observation:** continue to convince States to institutionalise the principle of systematically inviting the Congress to observe local and regional elections; increase the number of election observation missions and have the capacity to carry out two simultaneous observation missions; develop dialogue as part of post-election monitoring.

13. **Human rights / rule of law:** as part of the statutory activities, raise awareness of human rights among local elected representatives and their administrations and step up dialogue with local authorities and relevant associations in this area; strengthen co-operation with the Court, the Commissioner for Human Rights and the Venice Commission, as well as with the Directorate General for Human Rights and Rule of Law, for the effective implementation of the Register of Damages for Ukraine and the execution of the judgments of the Court.

14. **Co-operation:** Step up the implementation of co-operation projects and activities aimed at helping local and regional authorities to strengthen representative democracy and citizen participation in the framework of the Pact for Democracy; continue implementing the project to support Ukraine; ensure the impact on beneficiaries of assistance activities through qualitative legal opinions and political advice on local governance reforms in member States.

15. **Youth:** Strengthen the involvement of youth delegates in statutory and cooperation activities, particularly in the field (election observation); make more systematic use of the youth delegate “alumni” network.

## 2.2. The need to strengthen human resources and the operational budget for 2026-2027

16. The budgetary process for the next biennium 2026-2027 will take place in 2025, with the adoption of the budget by the Committee of Ministers scheduled for November 2025. The Congress Secretariat considers it necessary to accompany the consolidation and growth of its priority activities by a request for an additional increase in its human and operational resources, with a view to contributing to the Organisation's priority orientations such as **support for Ukraine** and the Secretary General's new **Pact for Democracy**.

### • Strengthening the management of the Centre of Expertise

17. As regards its co-operation activities, the Congress calls for the management structure to be strengthened by the creation of an A4-grade post for the Head of the Centre of Expertise.

18. Since its establishment in 2006 following the Warsaw Summit, the Centre of Expertise has been providing targeted, high-quality assistance to strengthen democracy and good governance at all levels in Europe, objectives which are now taking on greater importance as they lie at the heart of the new **Pact for Democracy**. Recognised by all stakeholders for the relevance and effectiveness of its actions, it has become a benchmark of excellence in its areas of action. The Centre is strongly committed to

**supporting Ukraine** and is implementing the largest project in the Action Plan designed to help the country on its path to EU membership.

19. Transferred in 2024, the Centre of Expertise is now a major asset for the Congress. However, the challenge is to preserve and perfect its capacity for action following its merger with existing co-operation activities. This integration has led to the creation of a major structure within the Congress – the **Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance** – bringing together some 50 people, both at headquarters and in the field offices, who manage an expanding portfolio of projects.

20. Currently headed by an A3-grade post, this structure requires a **higher level of management** to match the scale and complexity of its tasks. The post involves managing an entity equivalent to a division, with a large workforce and an increasing volume of complex projects that require rigorous coordination. In addition, the strategic responsibilities and interactions with high-level external partners (local and regional authorities, parliamentary committees, senior government officials, leading European experts) require appropriate representation, necessitating a higher grade to ensure the credibility and impact of the actions taken.

21. The lack of an A4 post also undermines the Centre's ability to anticipate strategic developments and **mobilise** financial resources (fundraising). This lack of **leadership** risks hampering the Centre's ability to adapt to the changing needs and expectations of its beneficiaries, leading to funding shortfalls and, ultimately, weakening the Centre's impact on democratic governance in Europe.

22. The creation of this A4 post is therefore now **urgently needed** by the Congress. It is essential to adapting the governance of the Centre to its new dimensions, optimising its internal functioning and consolidating its operational excellence. The objective is clear: to preserve and increase the Centre's effectiveness, guarantee the sustainability of its action and maximise its impact on beneficiaries in favour of democratic governance.

- **Statutory activities - Strengthening the follow-up given at local level to the recommendations of the Congress and the Council of Europe's main monitoring bodies**

23. The Monitoring Committee is increasingly called upon in its role of anchoring democratic standards at local and regional level and **combating the democratic setbacks** observed at all levels of governance in Europe.

24. The Committee not only regularly monitors the application of the Charter of Local Self-Government in the member States, but also carries out work and publishes reports on the main related challenges that threaten democratic standards (e.g. foreign interference in local and regional electoral processes). It is called upon to carry out more and more post-monitoring missions of its recommendations and wishes to carry out pre-electoral missions on a more regular basis. The Committee has ambitious plans to follow up these and other contemporary challenges, which are linked to issues at the heart of the Secretary General's **Pact for Democracy**.

25. Moreover, the increased desire of the Organisation as a whole to cooperate with the Congress (e.g. GRECO / GRETA / GREVIO) and disseminate the recommendations of their own monitoring missions at local level places new demands on the Committee.

26. The creation of a **B5 post** within the Monitoring Committee is necessary to enable more pre-election and post-monitoring missions to be carried out, and would strengthen its capacity to respond fully and effectively to such requests for collaboration, thus more effectively strengthening local and regional democracy in line with the priorities agreed in the Reykjavik Declaration.

- **Strengthening the Human Rights / Rule of Law Unit**

27. **Human rights** remain a **strategic priority** for the Congress, and the scope of its work is expanding. Key areas include contributing to the **Register of Damages for Ukraine** and monitoring the **execution of the Court's judgments at local level**. In order to ensure the efficient operation of this new unit (currently staffed by a single administrator), the creation of an **administrative support post (B2)** seems essential.

28. This reinforcement would ensure administrative support adapted to the unit's growing needs and enable it to concentrate fully on its essential missions.

- **Strengthening support for Congress Youth Delegates**

29. Since its creation in 2014, the youth delegates programme has been acclaimed by all Congress stakeholders. It is fully in line with the Council of Europe's youth policy priorities, and will undoubtedly serve as a mobilising factor to make a cross-cutting contribution to the new **Pact for Democracy**, as desired by the Secretary General and the Committee of Ministers. However, this initiative, which is now firmly anchored in the functioning of the Congress, has never benefited from dedicated and stable structural resources, which exposes it to the risk of interruption or abandonment. In order to guarantee its continuity and development, Congress therefore calls for the creation of a **B3 post** to consolidate the functioning of the Congress youth delegates programme.

- **Summary**

30. In total, for the 2026-2027 biennium, the Congress is therefore requesting the **creation of 4 additional posts** to support the strengthening of its statutory activities and strategic developments in its fields of action. This implies an increase in the annual budget allocation of € 395,200, including pension costs, for staff expenditure.

31. The development and strengthening of the activities of the Congress also requires that an **increase in its operational budget**. The Congress requests an increase in the annual budget of €155 000, corresponding to increased security for its sessions, coverage of the increase in the number of monitoring visits and election observation missions, the development of human rights and cooperation activities, and increasing the visibility of the Congress.

32. **In total**, the increase in the ordinary budget requested represents €550 200, i.e. an increase of 6.6%.