

The Bureau of the Congress

**CG-BUR(2022)47-70<sup>1</sup>**  
4 August 2022

## **Congress contribution to the High-level Reflection Group on the future of the Council of Europe and the role of the Congress therein**

Action required: for discussion

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<sup>1</sup> This document is classified as confidential until it has been examined by the Bureau of the Congress.

## **Executive summary**

*The Congress represents 130,000 local and regional authorities across Europe and implements the local and regional dimension of the Council of Europe's activities across its 46 member States. Its key mission is to uphold and advance the territorial dimension of European democracy, by anchoring democratic governance at the level closest to the citizen and ensuring a balanced distribution of power within States through decentralisation.*

*The Congress provides added value to the work of the Council of Europe by virtue of its unique position and experience, the proximity of its members to the realities on the ground, its extensive network of grassroots actors and in particular its monitoring and co-operation activities which allow the Congress to identify democratic and human rights setbacks at an early stage and act as an early warning system for the Council of Europe. Thus, the Congress can provide member States with expertise, recommendations and support in implementing a wide range of concrete responses to societal challenges, including legislative reforms.*

*The mayors and local councillors and elected members of regional governments and parliaments represented by the Congress, are not only on the frontline when responding to emergency situations such as large-scale migration and refugees or sanitary crises, but also the ones most in touch with citizens' daily needs, expectations and grievances. By engaging in constant dialogue with citizens, due to their proximity, local and regional authorities enjoy a high level of public trust – an asset that must be used by national governments.*

*The Congress is confident that, despite facing unprecedented environmental, societal and democratic challenges compounded by the brutal war of Russia against Ukraine and the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council of Europe will, through these deliberations, define common responses and shape a new future for the continent and its citizens. The Congress stands ready to contribute actively to the ongoing reflection process and to the implementation of its results in order to enable the Council of Europe as a whole to build on the experiences and capacity to act of the local and regional authorities united in the Congress.*

*As an organ composed of elected representatives, the Congress will closely cooperate and liaise with the Parliamentary Assembly in the course of the reflection process.*

*Based on the above, the Congress encourages the High-level Reflection Group to:*

- a. reflect the importance of the local and regional level as a key factor of democratic stability and security in its deliberations and recommendations;*
- b. strengthen the multi-level governance approach of the Council of Europe as a necessary way to create more resilient, inclusive and participatory societies across Europe;*
- c. concentrate the activities of the Organisation dealing with local and regional authorities and thematic activities involving municipalities, cities and regions and their national associations under the umbrella of the Congress for more coherence and impact ;*
- d. recommend that Council of Europe and member States and institutions make better use of the asset represented by the Congress' network of elected representatives to reach citizens and increase visibility of what the Council of Europe stands for;*
- e. strengthen the tools provided by the Congress local democracy monitoring mechanism by allowing the Congress to conduct local election observation missions on its own initiative and ensuring that the Congress has the resources it requires to carry out regular monitoring cycles as well as improved follow-up and increased post-monitoring dialogue on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government;*
- f. allocate the Congress the necessary means and resources to fulfil its statutory missions and implement its core thematic activities and re-establish a share of the Congress in the Council of Europe budget of approximately 3% of the total budget, as before 2010;*
- g. underline the importance of the Council of Europe's Action Plans, and in particular ensure that the Congress' co-operation projects within this framework receive sustainable funding from member States and the European Union;*

- h. ensure the inclusion of a youth perspective in its deliberations by consulting European youth organisations and Congress youth delegates in a meaningful manner;*
- i. hold an exchange with its political leadership and Secretary General about how these proposals can be best taken on board to achieve the objectives of the reflection process.*

## **Introduction**

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe welcomes the setting up of the High-level Reflection Group by the Secretary General following the mandate given by the Organisation's Committee of Ministers. The Group's deliberations and recommendations provide an opportunity to think collectively about the future, the future of the continent as well as the future of the Council of Europe.

2. This reflection takes place at a time when the Council of Europe is facing an unprecedented crisis situation, with the exclusion of a member State which launched a war against another of its members, as well as with a new reality on the European continent, where democracy and democratic values are seriously challenged on multiple fronts.

3. The Russian Federation's war against Ukraine is a flagrant violation of international law and of the very essence of what the Council of Europe stands for. This war represents not only a major humanitarian, migratory and economic tragedy but also a threat to the peace and stability of the continent. Beyond that, it jeopardises the world's geopolitical balance and threatens many countries in the world with food and energy shortages.

4. The Congress has repeatedly denounced this aggression against a sovereign member State, the exactions and crimes committed by the aggressor, as well as the assassinations, abductions and illegitimate replacement of local elected representatives in the occupied regions. It considers that the Russian Federation's exclusion from the Council of Europe was a difficult but necessary and courageous decision which should in no way penalise the other States nor the Organisation itself.

5. This brutal war has added to the existing challenges of climate change and environmental degradation, polarisation of society and growing inequality, rising extremism and populism, distrust and disengagement with political representatives and institutions, misinformation and fake news - many of which have been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic.

6. The Congress plays a unique and distinct monitoring and advisory role in the institutional framework of the Council of Europe. This role must be preserved and consolidated and to this end it is essential that the Congress be provided with the necessary human and financial resources. However, as highlighted in the Congress recommendation on the Budget 2022-2023 (Recommendation 454(2021) enclosed), over the last decade, its resources have decreased steadily and, in a proportion, significantly higher than other sectors in the Organisation, putting its functioning, operation and impact at risk. It is therefore essential to allocate the Congress the necessary means and resources to fulfil its statutory missions and implement its core thematic activities by re-establishing a share of the Congress in the Council of Europe budget of approximately 3% of the total ordinary budget as was the case before 2010.

## **A. Multilateral co-operation and multi-level governance**

7. The Council of Europe's role as the main pan-European political body has been fundamental since its creation in 1949 and today, when Europe stands at a crossroads, with the return to lasting peace more uncertain than ever, and with European societies plagued by multiple crises and questions, this role must be reaffirmed and consolidated.

8. The war against Ukraine has highlighted the need to continue the Organisation's work, and has underlined the importance of strong, democratically elected national, regional and local communities and leaders, within pluralistic democratic systems based on the Council of Europe's core values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

9. Since it was founded to "achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress", the Council of Europe has strengthened multilateral co-operation between European States and has, particularly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, helped the States of central and eastern Europe undertake the reforms necessary to facilitate their European integration.

10. This co-operation still provides the necessary framework to support the member States that are not yet members of the European Union in their integration process, with Ukraine requiring special attention and support in this respect.

11. The Council of Europe must however have a purpose distinct from that of the European Union and on no account be merely an antechamber of the latter.

12. It must also consider how to maintain links with those forces in Russia and Belarus that oppose the war and continue to defend the values of the Council of Europe. Even if this is particularly difficult and delicate at this point in time, the appropriate channels should be identified.

13. Action plans and co-operation programmes implemented at different levels of governance are among the concrete elements of the multilateral co-operation framework offered by the Council of Europe for its member states and the countries of the neighbourhood policy.

14. At local level, co-operation programmes are being implemented with member States' national associations and local authorities in order to strengthen local democracy, self-government and ethics, as well as the capacity of local elected representatives, and to reinforce reforms and the decentralisation of powers.

15. The Congress is convinced that stronger multi-level governance would not only allow for more effective co-operation and better coordinated action between and within countries at all levels, in particular in response to crisis situations, but would also enable the building of more resilient, inclusive and participatory societies in the long term. The respective decisions of the Athens Ministerial Session of 4 November 2020 address the need to build on multilateralism and multi-level governance to address complex challenges and provide the guidelines for this policy to be developed further.

16. As a consequence, and to achieve more coherence and impact, reflections should be held on how to best concentrate the activities of the Organisation dealing with local and regional authorities and thematic activities involving municipalities, cities and regions and their national associations under the umbrella of the Congress.

## **B. Monitoring democracy**

17. Local self-government is one of the main pillars of democracy. Indeed, the building of democratic societies begins at the level of villages, municipalities and cities from where it extends to entire regions and countries. Pluralistic democratic societies have to be built bottom up on the values of the Council of Europe.

18. The local level has a special responsibility in the defence, revival and revitalisation of democratic processes based on human rights and the rule of law. Its very proximity to the people can help to re-establish dialogue and regain the trust, support and participation of citizens in the democratic life of their communities. It is this proximity to the realities on the ground that also enables it to identify democratic setbacks at an early stage.

19. The monitoring of the situation of local democracy in the member States, which is the Congress' core activity, makes it possible to identify short-term or recurrent problems and provides States with expertise, recommendations and support in implementing concrete responses and reforms.

20. As the only pan-European body monitoring local and regional democracy, the Congress can produce tangible results, affecting all aspects of local governance. Numerous legislative reforms have thus been initiated by States on the basis of the observations and recommendations made by the Congress during the monitoring process.

21. The Congress' monitoring is based on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, a unique international treaty ratified by all member States which sets common standards for protecting and developing the rights and freedoms of local authorities and commits the parties to a number of binding conditions, principles and practices.

22. The Congress encourages the High-level Reflection Group to evaluate and strengthen the tools provided by its local democracy monitoring mechanism. A concrete measure could be to allow the Congress to conduct observation missions to local and regional elections on its own initiative. Additional resources to ensure regular monitoring cycles in all member States would also be necessary.

23. In addition, better follow-up should be given to monitoring or post-monitoring reports after their adoption. This could be done for instance by means of periodic meetings between rapporteurs and the national delegation of the country concerned on the progress of reforms, periodic contacts between Parliamentary Assembly and Congress rapporteurs to exchange views on the country concerned, and follow-up of recommendations by the Committee of Ministers. At present, little action is taken by the Committee of Ministers in respect of Congress recommendations in general.

24. The Congress complements its monitoring, post-monitoring and observation of local and regional elections with the provision of concrete support to local authorities through the implementation of co-operation projects within the broader framework of the Council of Europe's Action Plans.

25. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers to provide it with the necessary means and resources which it currently lacks in order to deliver on its tasks and mandate as conferred upon by the Committee of Ministers. It also calls on donor member States and the European Union to ensure sustainable funding for its co-operation programmes.

### **C. Citizen participation and youth involvement**

26. The Congress promotes more active participation of citizens at the local level, as deliberative democracy is a means of addressing disenchantment with democratic processes and lack of trust in institutions, as well as a useful method of overcoming ethnic and political divides. Its activities are based, in particular, around the annual organisation of the European Local Democracy Week and the Additional Protocol to the European Charter on Local Self-Government, on the right to participate in the affairs of local authorities, which celebrates in 2022 the tenth anniversary of its entry into force. Contrary to its mother Convention, not all member States of the Council of Europe are yet Parties to the Additional Protocol and therefore it is important to promote it.

27. Furthermore, the Congress pays particular attention to the participation of young people in decision-making at local level, both by inviting local authorities to improve their youth work policy and practice and by involving youth delegates in its own work - its committees and sessions in particular.

28. The Congress invites the High-Level Reflection Group to consult and engage European youth organisations and Congress youth delegates in its discussions. It also recommends that youth be used as vectors of communication for the Organisation and all of its activities.

#### **D. Multi-level responses to current challenges**

29. The development of concrete responses to challenges concerning the environment, social rights, gender equality, information and digital societies, participation, inclusion, ethics and transparency, based on a unique corpus of more than two hundred international treaties, represents a key contribution of the Council of Europe to the stability of the continent.

30. Local and regional authorities are also key actors in the development and improvement of people's living conditions. The war in Ukraine and the reception of Ukrainian refugees in Europe have clearly demonstrated the major role played by local elected representatives in this respect, in particular through the constitution of networks of cities, local support for civil society actions and solidarity between peers. The Cities4Cities online platform launched by a German municipality with the support of the Congress to better respond to the needs of Ukraine at war illustrates the concrete help that the local and regional level can provide to the collective effort of all national and European actors.

31. Congress members and the local and regional authorities they represent are, in their various capacities as mayors, councillors, governors, presidents of regions etc., responsible for a variety of public services which go hand in hand with the implementation of human rights. They play a key role in many aspects of human rights protection, respect and promotion, including the integration of migrants, the fight against hate speech, domestic violence, respect for LGBTI persons and environmental measures.

32. The series of "Human Rights Manuals" published by the Congress - covering the rights of refugees and migrants, social rights, human rights and the environment and, with regard to the next volume, the fight against violence against women - are in this respect valuable tools for elected representatives in the field. To improve the outreach of these key publications, member States are invited to provide the necessary resources to translate them into many languages used in their municipalities, cities and regions

33. As fundamental rights are experienced and realised first and foremost at local level, the European Court of Human Rights must take the work of the Congress into account to a greater degree when assessing and improving the implementation of its judgments.

34. Furthermore, as violations of fundamental rights are visible at an early stage at local level, the Congress could function as an "early warning system" for the Council of Europe.

35. Co-operation between relevant Council of Europe organs and entities could be strengthened and regular thematic exchanges should be organised based on the Congress' missions and reports and the work of its committees.

#### **E. The Congress, the voice of a vast network of grassroots actors**

36. Building a living democracy from the bottom up in Europe's towns and regions has always been the *raison d'être* of the Congress, from the first meeting in 1957 of the European Conference of Local and Regional Authorities to the creation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in 1994 following the 1993 Vienna Summit of Heads of State and Government.

37. The Congress implements the local and regional dimension of the Council of Europe's activities. Together with its members and the 130,000 local and regional authorities it represents, it forms a vast network rooted in the Council of Europe's fundamental values.

38. This network is committed to giving local and regional authorities a greater role in the development and implementation of national and European policies, to increasing their responsibilities and their involvement in decision-making processes, to strengthening their autonomy and to promoting and improving local and regional governance.

39. The Congress is an essential institutional tool for reaching out to citizens and giving the Council of Europe visibility, translated into concrete action. As such, it invites the Council of Europe member States to make better use of the asset represented by its network of elected representatives on the ground and hopes that the importance of the local and regional level will be better reflected among the members of the High-Level Group and in its reflections.

40. It calls on the High-Level Group to reflect, in its conclusions, the importance of the Congress and to recommend that the political context, respect and appreciation of the Congress in the institutional framework of the Council of Europe and in member States be improved.

41. In the course of the implementation of the 2021-2026 priorities, the Congress Bureau has started a reflection process on how to best achieve its functioning and working methods and to improve its funding, including identifying resources outside the Council of Europe budget. This process will be continued also in the light of the conclusions of the High-Level Group and, later, those of the Summit of Heads of State and Government.

42. In its recommendations to the Committee of Ministers on the budget, the Congress has regularly outlined the challenges it faces because of the successive and disproportionate budget cuts that have been imposed on it and the risk this poses to its ability to implement its political priorities and work programme in order to achieve the expected results, to be relevant, visible and have impact.

43. While the Congress does not ignore the difficult budgetary situation the Council of Europe is confronted with, in particular the need to compensate for the part left by the exclusion of the Russian Federation, it would see proportional cuts as the appropriate way to address the difficulties and cannot accept the fact that its share in the budget of the Organisation has been reduced by 20%.

44. Due to the lack of resources resulting from this budgetary inequality, some of its core statutory activities such as the monitoring of the situation of local and regional democracy cannot be fulfilled with the regularity and follow up it deserves. Furthermore, the timeline for the implementation of the work programmes of the committees had to be extended and, as appropriate, the number of texts had been reduced. Some activities previously organised by the Congress implemented with external partners had to be halted. Likewise, a whole series of activities that are perfectly suited to the current challenges – such as the Alliance of European Cities against Violent Extremism and the Roadmap to Prevent Corruption and Promote Public Ethics at Local and Regional Level - can only be resumed if additional operational and staff appropriations are received.

45. The deliberations and recommendations of the High-Level Group are the time and opportunity to address the issue of political and thematic priorities within the Council of Europe. Depending on the position and commitment of member States to the current budgetary situation and the need to ensure an adequate, balanced and equitable distribution of resources among the Organisation's key activities and entities, it may be necessary to refocus some of the Organisation's work. The reflection carried out by the Group should in any case contribute to ensuring that the key sectors of the Organisation have the means to fulfil their respective and complementary roles, tasks and competences.

46. Concerning the Congress, this means being able to return to a capacity to fulfil its mission as set out in the mandate given by the Vienna Summit in 1993.

## **Conclusion**

47. In accordance with its priorities for 2021-2026, through the work carried out by its committees, its monitoring activities and its co-operation programmes, the Congress, together with its 612 members and substitutes and the local and regional authorities from the 46 member States, is ready to contribute actively to the ongoing reflection process and to the implementation of its results, in the interest of the citizens it represents and for whose well-being, in accordance with its mandate, it is responsible and accountable. In order to fulfil this, it is essential that the Congress be provided with the necessary budgetary resources.

48. The Congress is convinced that the deliberations on the future initiated with the High-Level Reflection Group, which will be continued by the holding of a fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government, will make it possible to give new impetus to the Council of Europe and to strengthen both its means and its capacity to act. This will enable it to protect, defend and promote common values, define common democratic responses and shape the future of the continent for the benefit of its people and future generations, just as the founders of the Council of Europe did at the time of its creation.



**40th SESSION**

Remote meeting

Report

CG(2021)40-06

24 March 2021

**Budget of the Congress for 2022-2023**

Bureau of the Congress

Co-rapporteurs: <sup>1</sup> Anna MAGYAR, Hungary (R, EPP/CCE) and Barbara TOCE, Italy (L, SOC/G/PD)

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*Summary*

The Congress has repeatedly requested that its share of the Council of Europe Ordinary Budget 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. However, its share of the Ordinary Budget has dropped over 13% since 2010 from 2.92% to 2.53% in 2020 and the number of posts from 47 to 38 of which 2 have been frozen – and therefore cannot be filled – for several years.

These reductions have had a negative impact on the activities of the Congress including a significant increase in the backlog of monitoring reports on the situation of local and regional authorities in member States and a reduction in thematic activities. Any additional reductions in the budget and resources of the Congress in the next biennium would result in significant reductions of its activities and create additional risks for its statutory activities and for its thematic and co-operation activities, which already had to be adapted to fewer resources in the past.

This recommendation draws attention to the continued need to include in the draft programme and budget for the next biennium a budgetary envelope for the Congress which will fully recognise its contribution to the Council of Europe work and priorities by gradually returning to a share of 3% of the Ordinary Budget which is essential to its operations and to fulfil its mandate and to provide the Congress with commensurate human resources. It also calls for resource mobilisation aiming at voluntary contributions and secondments, and the use of the exceptional measures foreseen for monitoring bodies during the next biennium.

<sup>1</sup> 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 and Liberal Democrat Group  
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group  
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

## **RECOMMENDATION 454 (2021)<sup>2</sup>**

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

1. reaffirming its institutional role as the voice of local and regional authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe and as the guardian of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ECLSG) to which all 47 member States are Party, 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. recalling that the Congress Charter provides that compliance with the ECLSG by the Parties shall be monitored regularly and that since 2014 the monitoring work has increased steadily giving place to significant backlog further increased by the delays resulting from the current pandemic situation;

3. referring to the regular exchanges of views between the President and the Secretary General of the Congress with the Committee of Ministers, and welcoming the support and appreciation expressed by member States and the Committee of Ministers for the results achieved and reforms undertaken by the Congress;

4. recalling the successive budget cuts that the Congress has sustained over the years and the acknowledgement and understanding by member States of the risks that further budget cuts would entail for its statutory activities, post-monitoring, thematic and co-operation activities, which are tailored to member States' demands and interests;

5. further recalling that the Congress has been obliged to cut activities including those allowing it to address the challenges identified in the Secretary General's annual reports on the situation of democracy, human rights and the rule of law and the priorities of the respective chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers;

6. stressing that since 2010 the Congress has steadily contributed to the Organisation's efficiency savings and sustained operational and staff budgetary reductions proportionately higher than its share of the Ordinary Budget of the Council of Europe;

7. recalling its reiterated requests for its share of the Council of Europe's budget to be increased again towards 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;

8. recalling that the Congress' actual share of the Ordinary Budget has dropped over 13% since 2010 from 2.92% in 2010 to 2.53% in 2020 and its staff has been reduced by over 19% from 47 to 38 including two frozen posts;

9. recalling its successive reforms in 2010, 2015, 2018 and 2019 and its willingness to contribute to the overall efforts of the Organisation;

10. welcoming the decision of the Committee of Ministers to apply the adjustment for inflation in the current biennium and stressing the need to maintain it for the next one for the sake of maintaining the Organisation's capacity to deliver and respond to the new challenges as well as to its statutory tasks;

11. acknowledging the solution found for financing interpretation and translation into the Congress working languages: German, Italian and Russian;

12. Calls on the Committee of Ministers to:

a. acknowledge the results achieved and the efforts made by the Congress in increasing its efficiency of the Congress despite a reduced budgetary allocation and significant restrictions in the human resources made available to it;

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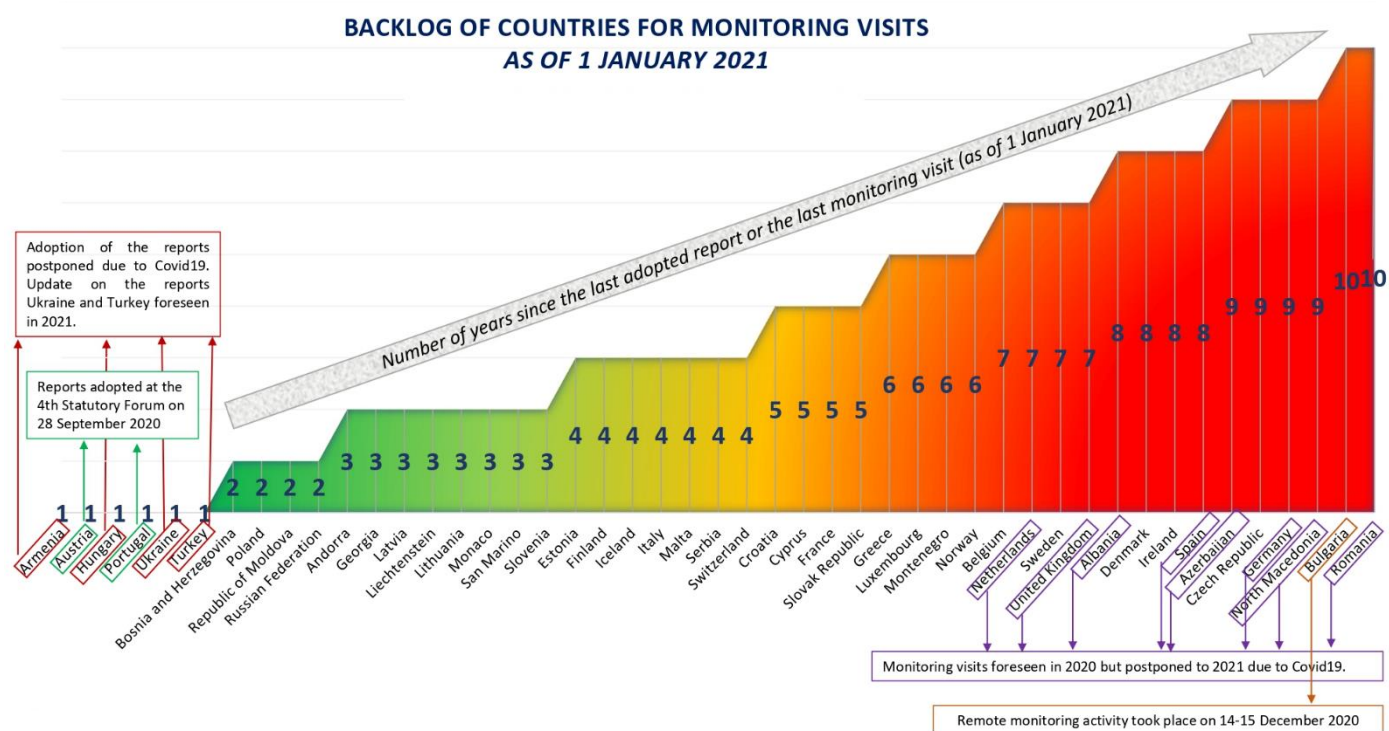
<sup>2</sup> Debated and adopted by the Congress on 24 March 2021, 1st sitting, co-rapporteurs: Anna MAGYAR, Hungary (R, EPP/CCE) and Barbara TOCE, Italy (L, SOC/G/PD).

- 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.* consider how best make use of the political and operational capacities of the Congress and its Secretariat to focus and concentrate all activities of the Council of Europe targeting local and regional authorities and their political representatives;
- d.* encourage member States to make voluntary contributions for concrete operational activities and second officials to the Congress Secretariat;
- e.* include the Congress monitoring of the ECLSG in the exceptional measures scheme to address the delays resulting from the Covid-19 health crisis;
- f.* allocate an operational budget and human resources to the Congress for the biennium 2022-2023 commensurate with the requirements of its institutional functioning as well as of its statutory, institutional, monitoring, thematic, consultative and advisory tasks to enable the Congress to implement the priorities identified for the current mandate;
- g.* agree to gradually return to a share of 3% of the Ordinary Budget without which the Congress can simply not fulfil its mandate or deliver what is entrusted with and expected to;
- h.* take into account the adjustment of inflation for the next biennium in order to maintain the Council of Europe a capable actor in the fields of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and enable all its organs and structures to deliver in the interest of the citizens of the 47 member States; and
- i.* invite the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to include in the draft programme and budget for the biennium 2022-2023 a budgetary 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.

## EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. Since 2008 the Congress has held regular debates on its budgetary resources, its development prospects, the resources needed and the choices to be made to achieve the objectives identified by its priorities.
2. The Congress has repeatedly called for the principle of zero real growth (taking into account inflation) be applied and its share of the Council of Europe Ordinary Budget 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.
3. The existing financial resources cover its basic activities and do not allow it to realise its full potential. For that reason, in 2013 the Bureau adopted a position paper and informed the Committee of Ministers that any additional cuts would endanger the Congress' work and undermine its unique capacity to protect, ensure and develop local and regional democracy in Europe.
4. In the past ten years the Congress has borne its share of the savings requested to all entities of the Council of Europe in a way which is more than proportional to its share in the budget of the Organisation. Thus, its share of the Ordinary Budget has been dropping steadily away from the target 3% share and the reduction has reached over 13% since 2010 from 2,92% to 2,53% in 2020 (see Table 1 in Appendix).
5. The same goes for staff resources, where the Congress has contributed more, in proportion to its share. Hence, the number of post has been reduced by nearly 20% over the last years from 47 in 2010 to 38 in 2020 of which 2 have been frozen -and therefore cannot be filled- for several year (see Table 2 in Appendix) bringing significant challenges for the implementation of activities.
6. The Congress has consistently supported the reform of the Council of Europe and has in a similar spirit carried out several reforms of structures and working methods in order to further improve its efficiency. They have resulted in changes to the Congress Statutory Resolution and Charter and Rules and Procedures to focus on its core statutory activities and contribute to the Organisation's efficiency savings. In addition, the Congress has made considerable efforts over the last years to contribute to efficiency savings and has in particular made every effort to lower a number of operational costs such as reducing printing by making full use of its website for members to access documents and for online registration for meetings and sessions.
7. The Congress remains committed to pursuing its efforts for potential efficiency savings in its administration and its operation. It should, however, have sufficient resources to deliver a quality support to its members, the local and regional elected representatives from the 47 member states. This is particularly crucial at a time when local and regional authorities have been at the forefront of the response to the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic and are set to play an important role in the post-crisis recovery. Fewer resources for the Congress would mean less support to local and regional authorities in this challenging times.
8. Preparatory work on the next biennium is underway and the Congress needs to draw the attention of the Committee of Ministers to the negative evolution of its budget and risks of further reduction of its resources.
9. The Congress' priorities for the next years are fully in line with the Council of Europe's priorities and the Secretary Generals quadrennial strategic framework for 2022-2025. It is therefore essential that it receives from the Committee of Ministers sufficient resources to allow it to implement these priorities and enable it to respond meaningfully to the priorities and work programmes set by the successive chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers.
10. In this respect it is concerning that over the last years, key statutory activities such as monitoring and observation of local and regional elections had to be reduced. This has resulted, in the case of monitoring, in significant backlogs further amplified by the travel restrictions resulting from the current health crisis (see table below). The exceptional measures proposed by the Secretary General for monitoring mechanism in respect of the delays resulting from the current health crisis and agreed by the

Committee of Minister should be extended to the Congress monitoring to tackle such delays and prevent further increases in the backlog.



11. Other operational activities such as the ones on youth, on Roma inclusion, are under threat or can no longer be implemented due to the lack of sustainable resources.

12. In this difficult context, the Congress, over the last years has received an increasing number of requests for co-operation and assistance on reforms proposed in member States as regards the structure, finance and functioning of local and regional authorities and their national associations and is currently implementing projects for a total value of some 4.5 million euros (see table below). Consequently, the Congress is expected to monitor such developments as well as to step up its post-monitoring dialogue and co-operation activities with individual member States.

## Congress ongoing co-operation activities

Country	Project	Funding	Budget
Armenia	Strengthening the Communities Association of Armenia and transparent, participatory local governance in Armenia	Switzerland	900 000
Moldova	Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and consultation of local authorities in the Republic of Moldova – Phase I	Bulgaria, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Norway, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland	175 000
Georgia	Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia	Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden	900 000
Ukraine	Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine	Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey	1 600 000
Mostar	Building Democratic Participation in the City of Mostar	Luxembourg, Norway	500 000
Kosovo*	Promoting local democracy in Kosovo*	Ireland, Norway	400 000
Morocco	Strengthening democratic governance at local and regional level in Morocco	Liechtenstein, Norway, Spain	294 045
Tunisia	Promoting local governance in Tunisia	Liechtenstein, Norway, Spain	346 096
			<b>4 475 000</b>

(\*) All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

13. Thus, despite the difficult budgetary context, the Congress has taken the responsibility of managing these additional financial resources in order to become an operational actor on the ground, in complementarity with its statutory work. Extra budgetary resources are instrumental to the implementation of co-operation activities, which further develop the work of the Congress in the fields of democracy, human rights and the rule of law and contribute to the operational programmes of the Council of Europe.

14. The Congress has successfully managed extra-budgetary resources provided by member States and the European Commission and closely cooperates and develops synergies with other Council of Europe services and field offices where Congress staff members have been recruited. This strategy needs to be continued and reinforced in the coming years.

15. The Congress remains committed to contributing in a meaningful way to the Council of Europe output and needs sufficient resources to achieve this objective from its specific situation and unique role within the Organisation. Further cuts in its operational budget and/or its human resources would seriously hamper its ability to carry out this role, its statutory activities and its capacity to respond to the increasing demand by member states for post-monitoring activities, as well as its growing potential as regards co-operation activities, which are closely linked to its statutory activities.

16. The Congress also remains committed to contributing to the identification and implementation of the priorities and the programme for the next biennium in the light of the Secretary General's quadrennial strategic framework and the thematic priorities of the Committee of Ministers presidencies in synergy and complementarity with the intergovernmental sector and the Parliamentary Assembly.

17. It will pursue its reform and focus its activities around its core priorities for the next biennium and will continue implementing activities in order to contribute, at local and regional level, to Council of Europe on-going and new campaigns and specific programmes launched in order to address topical issues. However, in order to successfully carry out its statutory mission and implement its core priorities in respect of the promotion and development of local and regional democracy, the Congress needs to be able to count on a sustainable basis for action, which includes an appropriate level of resources.

18. Against this background, in its recommendation the Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers to acknowledge the results achieved and the efforts made by the Congress in increasing its efficiency of the Congress despite a reduced budgetary allocation and significant restrictions in the human resources made available to it.

19. It highlights the importance of ensuring consistency between the priorities identified by the Congress and its budgetary allocations in order to achieve critical mass and a real impact and making best use of the political and operational capacities of the Congress and its Secretariat to focus and concentrate all activities of the Council of Europe targeting local and regional authorities and their political representatives.

20. It further calls for an operational budget and human resources to the Congress for the biennium 2022-2023 commensurate with the requirements of its institutional functioning as well as of its statutory, institutional, monitoring, thematic and advisory tasks.

21. More specifically it calls on the Committee of Ministers to include the Congress monitoring of the ECLSG in the exceptional measures scheme to address the delays resulting from the Covid-19 health crisis so as to reduce delays and prevent further increases in the monitoring backlog.

22. In line with increasing importance of extra-budgetary resources and the budgetary challenges described above, it calls on member States to make voluntary contributions for concrete operational activities and second officials to the Congress Secretariat.

23. Finally, it calls on the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to include in the draft programme and budget for the biennium 2022-2023 a budgetary 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. And calls on the Committee of Ministers to maintain the zero real growth principle and to bear in mind the risks and for the Council of Europe as a whole, and for the Congress in particular, of a budget for the next biennium and beyond based upon a zero nominal growth principle as compared to at least a zero real growth principle.

## APPENDIX

**Table 1 - Evolution of human resources within the Congress Secretariat**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Posts	42	41	39	37	37	37	37	37	37*	37*	37*
Positions	5	5	5	5	5	4	2	2	1	1	1
Total	47	46	44	42	42	41	39	39	38	38	38

(\*) including 2 frozen posts.

**Table 2 - Evolution of the Congress operational budget°**

	2010	2011	2012*	2013*	2014*	2015*	2016*	2017*	2018**	2019*	2020*
CoE	218 337 900	217 017 900	240 016 900	243 970 300	244 095 200	245 067 600	259 915 400	260 090 500	244 477 300	244 477 300	254 845 600
Congress	6 384 400	6 311 900	6 996 900	6 726 100	6 696 500	6 891 400	7 126 400	7 113 300	6 201 500	6 201 500	6 442 000
% Share Cong	2,92	2,91	2,92	2,76	2,74	2,81	2,74	2,73	2,54	2,54	2,53
% unspend Cong	2,88	1,98	0,74	2,31	3,23	1,13	2,81	1,74	2,67	0,53	7,73

(°) Figures of Council of Europe and Congress budget, as approved. % underspent Congress as adjusted.

(\*) including allocations to the Pension Fund as from 2012.

(\*\*) adjusted following cessation of Turkey's major contributor status.



### **THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES**

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#### **Recommendation 429 (2019)<sup>1</sup> The Congress's contribution to the reflection on the future of the Council of Europe (Helsinki Ministerial Session, 16-17 May 2019)**

1. In 2017, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe celebrated sixty 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 Authorities, forerunner to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, which was established in 1994 following the 1st Council of Europe Summit of Heads of State and Government 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, 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 key player for innovative thinking in these areas 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. Accordingly, the Congress 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's 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 coexistence.

2. In seventy years, it has succeeded in creating on the European continent 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 on Human Rights and the Court of Human Rights. It has promoted a model of democratic governance at both national and local levels 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 (ETS No.122), 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 and think about the world around us. 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 or 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 microsocieties). 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 liberal democracy where it is being threatened? How can we repair the social fabric where it has come apart? These are the challenges 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 can we 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 of a society – 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. These young people have 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 this 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 grass-roots 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 for advancing local and regional democracy on our continent through monitoring the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in the 47 member States, observing local and regional elections, recommending the necessary changes to governments, and sharing the 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, women and the whole of civil society. Since its creation, it has supported a broader and more appropriate use of participatory democracy, through legally regulated consultations at the grass-roots level. 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 grass-roots 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 answers.

21. Local and regional authorities play a crucial role in maintaining a strong social fabric, and the increasing importance of the role of mayors in society is a political fact. Like all local and regional elected representatives, mayors 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 democratically 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 could do.

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 grass-roots 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 in 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 stakeholders.

26. The grass-roots 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 in addition to international covenants – such as the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), 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 European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) 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 the protection of European citizens, and in developing its unique role as the pan-European mechanism for intergovernmental, interparliamentary 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 United Nations’ Agenda for Sustainable Development and from 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 in order 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 grass-roots 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 grass-roots level and the tools at its disposal to help meet the challenges brought about by the changes in our societies.

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1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 2 April 2019, 1st sitting (see Document [CG36\(2019\)08](#)), co-rapporteurs: Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC), and Gunn Marit HELGESEN, Norway (R, EPP/CCE).



Updated 29/06/2022

## High-level Reflection Group – Terms of Reference

### 1. Report

2022 will be remembered as a year of terrible violence and seismic change in Europe. The Russian Federation's aggression has caused profound suffering in Ukraine and cannot be reconciled with membership of the Council of Europe. On 25 February 2022, the day following the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, the Committee of Ministers decided to suspend the Russian Federation from the Organisation. Three weeks later, on 16 March 2022, in full agreement with the Parliamentary Assembly, it decided to exclude the Russian Federation from the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe was the first and so far, only international organisation to do so.

For more than 70 years, the Council of Europe has built a system of human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Europe that is unique in the world. This system is the strongest foundation for peace in Europe. The Council of Europe remains the largest pan-European organisation and the benchmark for human rights, the rule of law and democracy on our continent.

In such a new, and still evolving, European geopolitical landscape, it is vital to re-build peace in a Europe ravaged by war, and to support Ukraine, and other countries directly affected by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. In doing so, all member states must reaffirm their commitment to the principles and values of the Council of Europe as enshrined in the Statute and to the implementation of the rights and freedoms enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, including the unconditional obligation of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention to abide by the final judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. The European Union (EU) accession to the European Convention on Human Rights will provide greater coherence to the human rights protection system in Europe and ensure a united front in upholding European values.

The Council of Europe, whose membership comprises both EU and non-EU member states, has played a key role in promoting reforms in all member states and supported their European integration process, often from outside the EU, in light of its standards, and of the findings and recommendations of its advisory and monitoring bodies. This work should be continued and reconfigured, including in co-operation with the EU, in light of the new geopolitical context. At the same time, the Council of Europe has the responsibility to work with civil society in the Russian Federation and Belarus, empowering those who do not agree with the brutal politics of aggression practiced by their political leaders.

In order to support the Council of Europe in considering its responses to these new realities and challenges, the Committee of Ministers invited the Secretary General to set up a High-level Reflection Group. The terms of reference of the Group would include:

- a. the role of the Council of Europe as the primary pan-European political community, building upon its statutory aim “to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress” (Article 1 of the Statute);
- b. assessment of the impact on the European human rights protection system posed by the current non-accession by the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights and of the risks for the Council of Europe deriving from the protracted non-implementation of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights by the High Contracting Parties, and identification of possible measures to remedy these situations;
- c. definition of a new concept for sustained support to, and political and substantial co-operation with, Ukraine and other Council of Europe member states which are not yet EU members states, in their European integration path, in close co-operation with the EU;
- d. identification of actions to pursue and enhance the Council of Europe’s relations with the Russian and Belarusian civil society, including a roadmap on possible avenues of co-operation within the Organisation’s mandate;
- e. preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

## **2. Membership of the Group**

The Group comprises seven high-ranking individuals and its membership ensures, as far as possible, a balanced geographical distribution, a gender and age balance, as well as diversity of competences and professional backgrounds. A rapporteur is responsible for preparing the draft report.

The members are:

1. Mrs Mary Robinson, Chairperson;
2. Mr Evangelos Venizelos, Rapporteur;
3. Mr Bernard Cazeneuve;
4. Mr Josep Dallerès;
5. Ms Ine Marie Eriksen Søreide;
6. Ms Federica Mogherini; and
7. Ms Iveta Radičová.

## **3. Methodology**

The Group will be supported by the Council of Europe Secretariat for the organisation and preparation of its meetings. It will aim at delivering its report at the earliest possible opportunity, and no later than the handover meeting between the Irish and Icelandic Presidencies. Its operational costs will be covered by the budget of the Council of Europe.