



## Surmounting challenges effectively: making the Congress more political, more innovative and more influential

*Dear members of the Congress,*

You will be electing your next Secretary General on October 25. Taking place every five years, the election will, this year, be held in a context that is remarkable for several reasons.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has brought war back to Europe. We have not seen a conflict of this nature and that scale since 1945, with tens of thousands of civilian and military casualties. This belligerent act also marks the return of aggressive imperialism to Europe, posing an existential threat to each and every one of our democracies.

The conflict is also taking place against the backdrop of several pre-existing crises, which it has only exacerbated. I am referring, of course, to the climate crisis—the urgency of which the extreme temperatures this summer have emphasized—the energy transition, potential migrant crises and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

To confront all of these crises, what can the Congress do?

The Congress is well-positioned to represent local and regional authorities at the European level through working with the Council of Europe and individual European governments. It also has the power to influence and set an example for these individual local and regional authorities.

The Congress must meet the ever-greater need for democracy. Our local and regional authorities are the beating hearts of our democracies, working the most closely with our citizens. While the Congress provides a significant contribution to the Council of Europe's "democracy" pillar, our towns and regions also have a pivotal role to play when it comes to dealing with the multiple crises bearing down on us.

As for the climate crisis: 2/3 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals will need to be implemented at the local and regional levels.

As for the Ukrainian refugee crisis: our towns are the first to take them in.

We the Congress are a part of the solution to the crises we face, and have to take on this responsibility to resolve them. If we want to overcome these challenges, the Congress must assume an even more political, more innovative and more influential role.

*This is what I believe, this is my road map forward, and this is why I am asking you to place your trust in me.*

*Mathieu Mori*

## Mathieu Mori, a career at the heart of European institutions

Mathieu Mori was born in Haguenau, France, in 1980. He has two children, Maïa and Margot. He holds an undergraduate degree from the Lille Institute of Political Studies and a Master's degree in European Public Policy from University College London and a degree in history from Oxford University.



*After twelve years of occupying executive roles at the European level, Mathieu Mori has developed a wide network with the key European actors dedicated to democracy. Here, Mathieu Mori meets with the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, to discuss issues regarding the rule of law and the Neighbourhood Policy, which could result in fruitful synergy between the Congress and the European Parliament.*

He began his professional career in Paris, in a public policy evaluation company, then in London, in a consulting firm where he defended the tax interests of a coalition of 800 NGOs.

In 2010, he joined the Assembly of European Regions (AER), becoming its Secretary General in 2014.

In this role, which he occupied for six years, he increased the AER's political influence vis-à-vis European and international institutions, in addition to strengthening the AER's partnerships with other networks of towns and regions. He led the rapprochement with the Congress and the Council of Europe by making full use of the possibilities offered by the role of statutory partner of the Congress.

Lastly, he managed a major financial crisis at AER, making difficult but necessary changes, which allowed the organization to maintain its rank among the major European territorial networks.

In 2020, he was appointed director of the Interreg North-West Europe transnational cooperation program. With a budget of €310 million, it finances several hundreds of projects in European cities and regions. He had to, upon his appointment, deal with the crisis caused by Brexit and the program's loss of its primary financial contributor. He then facilitated and finalized two years of negotiations with the Member States and the European Commission to lay the foundations of the Interreg 2021-2027 program.

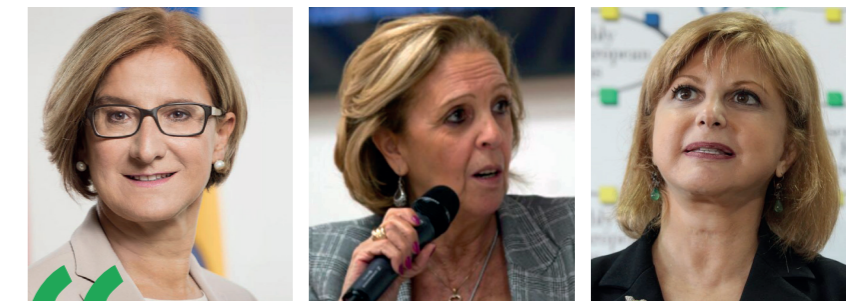
Mathieu Mori is a manager committed to benevolent and trust-based management style. Throughout his career, he has always paid particular attention to equal opportunities and promoting gender equality.

During his spare time, he enjoys swimming and rowing. Having been an organist in his youth, he is also a keen chorister. In painting, he enjoys most particularly the impressionists, especially the English painter William Turner.



*The Assembly of European Regions has historically been among those regional political associations with a presence on the Black Sea coast. Drawing on ties established over many years, Mathieu Mori took part in the launch of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine. This launch gave him the opportunity to discuss the humanitarian situation facing the city of Irpin with its mayor, Oleksandr Markushyn. Ukrainian local authorities and elected representatives stand shoulder to shoulder with their citizens, who are suffering greatly as a result of the Russian invasion. The Congress has an obligation to provide unwavering support to Ukrainian local and regional authorities in their struggle.*

## Testimonies from Three Former Presidents of the AER



*As women in politics, former Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the Assembly of European Regions (AER), coming from a variety of different political and cultural backgrounds, we can testify to Mathieu's exemplary professionalism. He has demonstrated great insight and loyalty while advising and assisting us. He has always paid close attention to the Assembly's elected representatives, respecting everyone and doggedly defending the interests of all. He has inspired enthusiasm and determination among both the Assembly and his team, and has always championed equal opportunities and gender equality for all.*

*From left to right: Johanna Mikl-Leitner (Lower Austria, Austria) Vice-President of the AER from 2010 to 2011; Michèle Sabban (Ile-de-France, France) President of the AER from 2008 to 2013; Dr Hande Özsan Bozatli (Istanbul, Turkey) President of the AER from 2013 to 2017.*

## Mathieu Mori worked with each one of them as Secretary General of the AER

*Thank you for your support. It was a fantastic experience serving you and, serving you, serving regional democracy. Elected representatives are central to our democracies. Their level of engagement with issues and their commitment to representing their citizens are a gauge of a thriving democracy. In order for our assemblies to run smoothly, elected representatives need to be supported in their work with respect, dedication and loyalty. That's the role of an engaged, responsible Secretary General, and that will be my guiding ambition for the years to come.*

## The Council of Europe's Flagship Mission: Human Rights

Human rights is about more than just an international treaty or convention; it's a culture which we must instil at all political levels, from the citizen all the way up to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. In addition to their standard responsibilities, local and regional authorities have an obligation to foster such a culture.

This goes not only for the relationship local and regional authorities have with their citizens, but also for the educational nature of the public policies they enforce and daily political work they carry out. Building a solid foundation of human rights culture within society will ensure greater respect for the convention at a local and regional level and less recourse to Strasbourg.

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## The Congress Must Show Solidarity with Ukraine



Mathieu Mori met Liliia Pashynna, President of the Ukrainian delegation to the Congress. Despite the tragic circumstances, the Ukrainian delegation and its President have shown determination to engage with the Congress.

“ I decided to visit Kyiv, Ukraine, the week of August 24. My trip coincided not only with the poignant six-month anniversary of the start of the Russian invasion, but also with Ukraine’s Independence Day. My hope for my visit was to show my solidarity with a country that has been the victim of a barbaric assault, as well as with its mayors and regional presidents, who have shown in the darkest hours of their history just how important of a role they play in protecting the citizens they represent. However, the shadow of this new Russian imperialism extends far beyond Ukraine’s borders.

The Congress immediately demonstrated its solidarity with Ukraine, chiefly through recommendations regarding “the reception of refugee women and children in Europe’s cities and regions”. The elected members of the Congress have also introduced initiatives such as the “cities4cities” network, launched by President Vöhringer in partnership with the Association of Ukrainian Cities and the Congress.

We must continue these efforts. Once the conflict comes to an end—which it shall—I am determined to ensure that the Congress contributes towards strengthening local and regional authorities in Ukraine, respecting our democratically elected representatives and human rights.”

Details of Mathieu Mori’s visit to Kyiv can be found on his website.

## Our Youth: a Top Priority for the Congress



Mathieu Mori recently met with the European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya Gabriel (from Bulgaria) to discuss issues affecting young people. Both the European Union and the Council of Europe share the same concerns regarding the integration of young people within our societies.

The Congress has long understood just how important our youth are when it comes to the future of democracy in our cities and regions. A number of reports on these issues have all stressed that listening to young people, getting them involved in their communities, and offering them access to education, training, and employment makes a significant contribution to the democratic and socio-economic dynamism of their cities and regions.

Over the last few years, the Congress has experimented with a “young delegates” programming, granting youth representatives the opportunity to participate in a highly open and flexible way within each delegation.

However, this experiment may now be under threat of budget cuts as a result of the financial difficulties facing the Council of Europe

and, as a result, the Congress. We must explore all of our budget options in order to continue and even expand this policy. Getting young people back into the hearts of our democratic institutions is an absolute must.

## Empowering Local and Regional Authorities to Take the Initiative when Tackling Challenges

### Promoting the Charter

Through an international convention, the Congress is the only European institution working to ensure that local and regional democracy runs smoothly on our continent. A number of democratic advances have been made within member states thanks to recommendations that the Congress’s monitoring committee has made.

With challenging budgetary times ahead of us, we must protect the political heart of the Congress. To do so, we must work in total synergy with member states to ensure and improve monitoring of—and follow-up on—the Charter, in addition to election observation.

### Influencing Governments

Towns and regions have a vital role to play in the solutions to the threats facing us. The recommendations and observations we make are useful to member states, and we must continue to improve both their visibility and how governments receive them.

The work carried out by committees must remain relevant and innovative, while adhering to the Council of Europe’s three pillars. Mr Lambertz’s report on deliberative democracy, for example, provides practical examples which the Committee of Ministers examined positively while preparing a resolution on the subject.



Territorial associations and the Committee of the Regions have an interest in cooperating with the Congress, which offers a unique level of topical expertise. Mathieu Mori has been working with their secretaries general for a number of years now. Top photo: Fabrizio Rossi, Secretary General of CEMR. Bottom photo: Petr Bližkovský, Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions.

## Meeting People’s Needs Through Cooperation

Cooperation programmes help towns and regions apply the Charter and implement recommendations and resolutions from the Congress.

Cooperation with Ukraine and other “front line” countries such as Georgia and Moldova must remain a priority. Particular attention must be paid to the western Balkans and the Caucasus.

Ensuring the longevity of this type of funding within a constrained financial and institutional framework will require determination and diplomacy.

Furthermore, territorial associations and both European and international institutions also benefit from the expertise of the Congress. These organizations have the capacity to share its work more widely.

## Boosting the Visibility and Influence of the Congress

The work carried out by the Congress is often innovative when it comes to improving democracy in the local and regional contexts. Yet awareness of its endeavours has to be raised, particularly at the governmental level. A significant amount of work has been undertaken, aimed at establishing partnerships with European institutions and territorial associations. Although the Congress is now well-known and respected—not only in the local and regional ecosystem within Europe, but also internationally—it still does not carry the influence it could—or should.

Within the Council of Europe, the Congress must also be viewed as a second political assembly comprising elected representatives within an intergovernmental organisation. Greater dialogue with the Committee of Ministers is essential.

The Congress communication must finally be given additional resources, and we must continue to develop our social media presence. An emphasis must also be placed on interlinking our social media with those of our elected representatives. Lastly, it is vital that we assist elected representatives and involve them in this digital communication plan.

## Increasing the Means of Action for Elected Representatives

The Congress is formed of elected representatives from local and regional authorities, who give it its own identity and political dimension within the Council of Europe. Coming from a range of different backgrounds, they make up an assembly that is committed to democracy at local and regional level. Elected representatives work for the Congress in addition to one or more mandates in their home countries. The vast majority of them are also engaged in a professional activity. This is a difficult context in which to work, and we must seek to help through the secretariat offering support and other innovative solutions.

In order to boost elected representatives’ means of political action, consideration must be given to:

- supporting political groups in order to promote political dialogue and stimulate propositions
- implementing a more flexible linguistic framework for statutory activities
- improving communication with elected representatives in the Parliamentary Assembly
- reinvigorating dialogue with the Committee of Ministers

In order to achieve this goal while remaining within our fixed budget, we must increase our responsiveness by eliminating needless bureaucracy.

The Secretariat of the Congress already has the authority and the commitment; given fresh impetus, it can reform those procedures that have become inefficient.

A longer version of Mathieu Mori’s program can be found on his campaign website. There you will also find a testimonial from Magnus Berntsson (President of AER).