

Priorities of the Congress 2009-2010



Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
of the Council of Europe

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Introduction by Yavuz Mildon, Congress President



Twenty years ago, on 1 September 1988, the European Charter of Local Self-Government entered into force, heralding the recognition of territorial community as a new actor in the European political landscape. Ever since, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has been the only European body tasked with monitoring the Charter's implementation across our continent, in the 47 Council of Europe member states. Monitoring the state and development of territorial democracy, consolidating and strengthening democratic processes at local and regional level, and defending the rights of communities and their authorities remain the overarching priority of the Congress, its *raison d'être*.

However, European integration, processes of globalisation and decentralisation, global phenomena of climate change, crisis of water resources, excessive consumption or economic migration pose new challenges today, requiring innovative action at all levels of governance. This entails further redistribution of competences and financial resources towards local and regional authorities, which are best placed to provide responses and implement measures on the ground tailored to the needs and expectations of our citizens.

To help local and regional elected representatives to meet the challenges facing them, the Congress, a representative body and political voice of more than 200 000 territorial communities in Europe, has put forward a number of projects, initiatives and instruments aimed at making our cities and regions citizen-centred, cohesive and sustainable, at ensuring good local and regional governance, at fostering intercultural and interreligious dialogue at local and regional level, and

at promoting transfrontier, intermunicipal and inter-regional cooperation across our continent and beyond.

Creating the enabling environment for implementing these projects and applying these instruments is the objective of the Congress' priorities for 2009-2010. Grouped around five axes of action, these priorities focus on enhancing the Congress' institutional mission and efficiency, fostering relations with its partners, extending external partnerships and consolidating cooperation networks for the benefit of our communities.

They are geared in particular towards ensuring the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, through monitoring and observation of local and regional elections, and improving governance at local level; applying the principles of European Urban Charter II: Manifesto for a new urbanity, and the European code of conduct for local and regional elected representatives; convincing national governments of the expediency of the European Charter of Regional Democracy; elaborating the first European Charter on City Diplomacy; strengthening associations of local and regional authorities and their networks; and promoting transfrontier Euroregions. A particular emphasis is placed on enhancing cooperation with our Mediterranean and Middle Eastern neighbours, and with relevant bodies of the United Nations.

In achieving these objectives, we will continue to rely on close cooperation with our partners – national, European and international associations of local and regional authorities, the EU Committee of the Regions, European regional organisations and Congress observer organisations. Their support, and their active involvement are the necessary condition for the realisation of our ambitious vision of a Europe of Sustainable Communities. ■

Yavuz Mildon,
*President of the Congress
of Local and Regional Authorities
of the Council of Europe*

Contributions by the Presidents of the Congress Political Groups



EUROPEAN PEOPLE'S PARTY - CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS GROUP

In 1994, we succeeded in establishing the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities as an equal partner of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers within the institutional framework of the Council of Europe.

The role of the Congress is irreplaceable with respect to safeguarding and developing local and regional democracy in Europe, through election observation at the local and regional level, and through monitoring reports and follow-up procedures on local and regional democracy issues.

After a long period of discussions and deliberations, the European Charter of Regional Democracy was adopted by the Congress in May 2008, and it is now of utmost importance to integrate this text into the European legal framework. The aim is to establish an agreed definition of different types of regions within Europe, and to guarantee and safeguard the existence and the rights of the regions in a binding form.

We have to improve cooperation between the EU Committee of the Regions and the Congress. In order to avoid duplication, we need to put in place a clear division of each other's labour and tasks. Furthermore, a reciprocal recognition of the respective achievements is indispensable. The existing close institutional cooperation should also be pursued between the statutory committees of the Congress and the specialised committees of the Committee of the Regions.

The regions with legislative powers in Europe have established themselves within two European institutions – RegLeg, which is a conference of heads of regional governments, and CALRE, which is a conference of presidents of regional parliaments. Through the Committee of the Regions, RegLeg and CALRE, the principle of subsidiarity, promoted by the Congress, is gaining ground also within the EU. By establishing specialised

working groups dealing with regions with legislative powers, the Congress and the Committee of the Regions have recognised the specific value of these entities. These working groups should be further supported and reinforced, in order to strengthen federalism and regionalism on our continent.

Finally, it is of fundamental importance to foster, on the one hand, transborder cooperation at the regional level, and, on the other hand, cooperation between regions, in particular regions with legislative powers, and local communities, bearing in mind the principle of subsidiarity.

Herwig van Staa ■



SOCIALIST GROUP

The year 2009 will mark the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe to which the Congress, successor of the Conference of Local Authorities, has contributed in a decisive manner during the entire historic period which began with the end of the Second World War.

The Congress' activities have always focused on political and institutional issues closely affecting the everyday life of European citizens. Every citizen can in fact judge in real terms the effects of governance of territorial communities at local or regional level; indeed, the level and quality of democracy are largely determined by the relationship between local institutions and the citizen. This is why the Congress, through its numerous activities, initiatives, evaluations and proposals, seeks to develop European local democracy, thus strengthening the link between institutions and society in all its different forms of governance. Democracy is never a given; it is part of a political, institutional, economic and social process which must constantly evolve and adapt in order to guarantee freedom, the well-being and security of citizens.

This general and absolute priority must be pursued across all the domains of Congress activities. Among those, the European Charter of Local Self-Government has represented, for twenty-five years, the most efficient instrument for reinforcing the role of territorial communities. The same can be said about the observation of local elections which, beyond its purpose of monitoring electoral laws, aims to prompt legislative changes in the core of institutional democratic life. Finally, the European Charter of Regional Democracy remains an instrument which still needs our support to ensure its adoption and implementation.

To put in place an efficient system of governance, local and regional institutions must be able to rely on associations of local and regional authorities. There is in fact an interdependence between the role and the strength of local self-government and associations, which is why their relations should be non-procedural, flexible and individually tailored, rather than purely formal. Such a relationship would allow for their development in each member state, as an expression of their autonomy and that of territorial authorities, and as an essential requirement of democracy.

Fabio Pellegrini ■



INDEPENDENT LIBERAL DEMOCRAT GROUP

2009 is a landmark year for the Council of Europe, marking its 60th anniversary. The Congress will play a full part in this significant year.

The Congress must remain at the forefront of regional and local democracy. In this respect, the adoption of the draft Charter of Regional Democracy in 2008 has been an important step forward for regional self-government, but there is an extremely long path to tread before any Council of Europe instruments can be open for signature.

The draft Additional Protocol to the European Charter to European Self-Government, on Democratic Participation, has completed its progress through the Congress and is now being prepared by the European Committee for Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR).

Also, 2009 will see the third year for the European Local Democracy Week initiative, and we need to build on the very active participation of hundreds of municipalities in the 2008 event to make the week around the 15 October an outstanding one for local democracy in 2009.

One of the core activities of the Congress will continue to be monitoring of elections. Also, fact-finding missions into democracies in member states must continue to react quickly to when particular problems arise at a local or regional level. Recent missions, for example, have included both visits to Latvia and Belgium to deal with local difficult situations.

Co-operation with the other parts of the Council of Europe family must be one of our top priorities, particularly working with the Parliamentary Assembly and its political groups and, in my specific case, to work with the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe to make local democracy initiatives and objectives more visible at a national and international level.

Also, working with the various local government associations throughout our member states and with our colleagues in the Committee of the Regions of the European Union must be vigorously pursued to ensure that we are in synch with our partners in European local and regional government. The Congress has a particularly important role to play as a bridge builder between the European Union and the Council of Europe member states who are not members of the European Union. Europe must be considered as one region in a globalised world.

Action in the field of human rights is also a core activity which must be pursued, in particular preventing trafficking of human beings by promoting the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking which came into force on 1 February 2008. We must encourage member states to sign and ratify this convention and increase public awareness.

Finally, through our Sustainable Development Committee, we must ensure that green issues remain at the forefront of our Congress priorities.

Keith Whitmore ■

Congress priorities 2009 – 2010

Adopted on 3 December 2008

Foreword

1. The 1994 decision of the Council of Europe member countries to create the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities set the seal on forty years of endeavour and commitment for the furtherance of local and regional democracy and for the recognition of the decisive role performed by local and regional government entities in European unification.
2. This bicameral political assembly, whose elected members represent over 200 000 local and regional authorities in the 47 member states, has equipped itself with a hitherto unique instrument, the European Charter of Local Self-Government.
3. The Congress is accordingly vested with a fundamental political role, being instructed by the Committee of Ministers to watch over the implementation of this Charter which guarantees the reality of democratic freedoms in all territorial communities of the member countries.
4. On that score, the Congress has been given particular responsibility for local election monitoring in the countries undergoing transition, a task which complements the mission pursued by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in respect of national and presidential elections. Moreover, the Congress and the parliamentary Assembly are active members of the Council of Democratic Elections, created in the framework of the Venice Commission.
5. As the custodian and the benchmark of grassroots democracy, the Congress holds an uncontested institutional position confirmed by the Warsaw Summit Declaration. Over and above this priority goal, however, the Congress is also destined to act as a forum for exchange and dialogue where all its members can more fittingly meet the obligations and challenges which are more and more the strict province of local and regional government.
6. Moreover, at both European and international level, the Congress has a duty to develop relations with all organisations in order to create profitable synergies. Its natural partners in that regard are the

Committee of the Regions, which shares with the Congress the distinction of being an institutional assembly of local and regional elected representatives, and the national Associations, true national parliaments of local and regional authorities.

7. Still more naturally, the Congress also carries on close co-operation in the Council of Europe, specifically with the Parliamentary Assembly, the Committee of Ministers and all bodies engaging in intergovernmental debate about the place of local and regional authorities, such as the Venice Commission, the inter-governmental sector responsible for this field of action...
8. Sustained by the recognition accruing from its work, the Congress intends to weave the main priorities of its future two-year mandate against the backdrop of this institutional and international network.

I. Promoting and enhancing the institutional mission of the Congress

1. The Congress will persevere with the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. It will monitor the situation at the local and regional level in the member countries and will continue to meet the requests for expert appraisal of the Charter's application in all specific cases.
2. It will place emphasis on the response to the recommendations directed at Governments. It will give priority to such relations, exchanges of experience and co-operation schemes as enable the authorities concerned to fulfil the operative clauses of the recommendations.
3. The Congress will pay particular attention to Conferences of European Ministers responsible for local and regional authorities, taking care to promote and to bring its political priorities to their attention.
4. In this context, the Congress will bear in mind the agenda of the Budapest Conference and contribute

to the implementation of the European Strategy for innovation and good governance at local level.

5. As regards the monitoring of local and regional elections in the member countries, and even beyond, the Congress will pay special attention to the conditions under which local democracy is practiced. Its contribution therefore will not be confined to reporting objectively on the electoral processes, but will extend to scrutiny of each state's particular circumstances in applying the rules of local and regional democracy.
6. Likewise, evaluation of the electoral process, now the subject of a resolution adopted by the Congress, may contribute to the work of supervising the Charter, and possibly give rise to definite proposals for action.
7. With regard to regional democracy, the Congress will direct special efforts at the Governments and the regional authorities themselves to publicise, promote and explain the Charter of Regional Democracy, (which it adopted at the 15th Plenary Session in 2008). Of course, if it is adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, this Charter will sanction the principles of regional self-government and experience the same success as the Charter on local self-government which has been efficient to promote democracy at this level. In addition, work relating to "Regions with legislative power" as well as encouragement or support to the processes of regionalisation in certain countries will be a priority for the Congress.
8. The Congress will show particular concern for educating the citizens and raising their awareness about grassroots democracy and the role which they could or should perform by exercising their rights in that regard. Actuated by this goal, the Congress will continue exerting itself to promote Local Democracy Week, an initiative henceforth to be staged each October in order to acquaint the citizens more closely with the conduct of local democracy by their elected representatives. The Congress – in conjunction with the intergovernmental sector of the Council of Europe – will shoulder the promotion of this initiative and the Europe-wide co-ordination of the related events.

To do this, the Congress will support information and promotional campaigns, information seminars and study visits that local authorities or national associations wish to hold in the framework of the European Local Democracy Week. Again in conjunction with this sector it will contribute, at its own level of relevance, to the implementation of the Strategy for Good Governance.

9. In the same manner, and in cooperation with the associations and the members of the Congress themselves, the Congress will organise events aiming to present to elected bodies and to citizens solutions that could contribute in a concrete way to good governance for example the European Urban Charter II – Manifesto for new urbanity or the European Code of conduct for the political integrity of local and regional elected representatives.

II. Fostering external relations and pooling the skills of the Congress and its privileged interlocutors

1. **National associations** representing local and regional authorities are the Congress's natural partners. The contacts that they have with various institutions prompt them to be involved more closely in the Congress's tasks. While continuing with active, well-focused, practical co-operation, the Congress will attempt therefore to ascertain and meet these associations' needs more effectively. New priorities, following on from those set at the first general meeting in 2006, will be set jointly.
2. Local and regional authorities are banded together in a large number of **European and international associations** with the aim of asserting their presence on the European or international scene and attending to the matters that concern them, so as to uphold and advance their role in European unification.
3. The associations, valuable allies of institutions working in this field like the Congress and the Committee of the Regions, hold a strategic position in the European landscape of local and regional government and in the further dimension of European unification.

4. The Congress has always wished for constructive relations with these agencies, is convinced of their indispensable role, and will keep up a special effort to develop the already very positive relations which it maintains with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR).
5. In the spirit of enhanced relations with the national associations, the Congress will endeavour, particularly in conjunction with the CEMR as their European emanation, to pursue practical synergies and actions as regards local democracy and institutional questions. It will associate the CEMR with its initiatives on "city democracy" and on co-operation of local authorities in the Euro-Mediterranean region.
6. Co-operation with the CEMR aimed at synergy without rivalry can only further the harmonious and profitable development desired by the Congress together with the associations, to the satisfaction of the Congress and the CEMR alike.
7. Also, with more specific reference to the regional level, the Congress realises that the AER is one of the natural allies for the defence of regionalisation and the principles of regional self-government.
8. It will therefore undertake intensified co-operation with the AER and the other associations handling these issues in order to associate them more pointedly in promoting the principles of regional self-government embodied in the Charter of Regional Democracy adopted at the 2008 plenary session, so that the Charter may be adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe member countries.
9. The development of transfrontier co-operation is intrinsically linked to the strengthening of the decentralisation process and is a good example of the principle of subsidiarity at work. As the association at European level which represents the interests of European border and cross-border regions, the AEBR constitutes a most important partner for the Congress in the promotion of transfrontier co-operation. The Congress will step up co-operation with the AEBR in particular in the framework of its Working Group on Inter-regional Co-operation.
10. To this end, the Congress aims particularly to favour staff exchanges, study visits as well as internships for representatives of the national associations.
11. **The Committee of the Regions** will also be given a prominent place in the inter-institutional Congress's relations .
12. Being invested with the same task of preserving the role and the position of local and regional authorities in the building of a democratic Europe, the Congress and the Committee of the Regions will pool their efforts in a spirit of goal-specific practical co-operation, paying due regard to each other's special features.
13. The Congress will continue, in particular, to involve the Committee of the Regions in its local and regional election observation missions.
14. Together these two institutions will continue to work towards the respect of the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality.
15. This co-operation will also extend to the contribution that both bodies are required to make at their respective levels to the implementation of the co-operation agreement between the European Union and the Council of Europe.
16. **Congress observers** will be paid increased attention. A meeting of all the organisations and bodies to which the Congress has granted observer status will be held shortly to work out arrangements for increased co-operation and dialogue.
17. New approaches will be made to **Euro-Mediterranean and international partners** with which the Congress already has substantial links.
18. As well as reinforcing its international contacts the Congress will grasp the opportunities offered by the new Euro-Mediterranean policy to give extra impetus

to its fruitful relationships with the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean, the Arab countries, Israel and Palestine.

19. This will be an opportunity for the Congress to provide the benefit of its expertise in the areas of local democracy, good governance and city diplomacy, taking advantage in particular of co-operation with the Council of Europe's North-South Centre with which the Congress has just conclude a co-operation agreement.
20. The Congress will continue the cooperation with UN-HABITAT on decentralisation and the strengthening of local authorities and will develop its proposed Charter on diplomacy in cities

III. Consolidating and extending partnerships and co-operation networks

1. The Congress has been the instigator of numerous networks, including the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA), the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe (NALAS) and the European Network of Training Organisations for Local and Regional Authorities (ENTO). It will continue to foster relations with these by promoting increased interaction with Congress activities.
2. It will honour its commitment to the CLIP network¹ promoted by Eurofound, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.
3. As regards the establishment of Euroregions of a new type covering Europe's semi-landlocked seas, the Congress will monitor and take part in the development of the Adriatic Euroregion, beyond the launching of the Black Sea Euroregion, it will contribute

ensuring in particular that co-operation is established with the European Union Black Sea Synergy project, and will identify areas in which co-operation of the same type might be established around the Baltic Sea.

IV. Meeting the challenges facing local and regional elected representatives

1. Through its theme-based statutory committees² and its working groups,³ the Congress aims to deal with the subjects which interest its members the most.
2. It will therefore focus on the challenges faced by local authorities due to climate change, it will emphasise the need to develop intercultural and interreligious dialogue and will deal with openly the phenomenon of migration and the policies of integration. As it did in 2007-2008 on the occasion of the Council of Europe campaigns on these subjects, the Congress will continue to be involved in the fight against trafficking in human beings and against domestic violence.
3. Priority-setting and consultation with associations should enable the Congress to target its projects more accurately while retaining the ability to react to priorities dictated by current events.
4. The same concern will guide the work of the Chambers, which will be required to address priorities specific to their level of competence.

V. Making the Congress more efficient and giving it a higher profile

1. The Congress has an indisputable political role and it must reassert its status as a political assembly of the local and regional elected representatives of the Council of Europe member states.

1 *European network of cities for local integration policies for migrants.*

2 *Institutional Committee, Committee on Social Cohesion, Committee on Sustainable Development, Committee on Culture and Education.*

3 *Working Group on regions with legislative power, working group on interregional co-operation, working group of local and regional elected representatives of South-East Europe.*

2. It has begun this process through a major administrative reorganisation designed to modernise and streamline its working methods. This will result, from 2009 onwards, in the holding of a second annual plenary session. The Congress has also adopted a new information policy intended to raise the profile of its members, activities and work. One of the main goals is to ensure the total success of the two annual sessions and to arrange for the texts it adopts to be disseminated more broadly and followed up more intensively.
3. The Congress would like its members and their substitutes to be involved in these new processes. In

particular, it will hold more goal-specific events and promote non-statutory activities such as election observation and participation in representation missions. Increased co-operation with national associations should contribute to the achievement of these goals.

4. Finally, the Congress will play an active role in the different communication campaigns of the Council of Europe. It will be obvious vector for the authorities it represents. The 60th birthday celebrations of the creation of the Council of Europe will be for the Congress the occasion to remind everyone of its ever-increasing contribution to the European challenges of today and in the future.



Congress, a political assembly of local and regional elected representatives

At the heart of our cities and our regions, the Congress brings democracy to your doorstep

The Congress is the local and regional authorities' representative body at the Council of Europe.

It is working for 50 years for local democracy. It comprises a Chamber of Local Authorities and a Chamber of Regions. Its 315 full members and 315 substitute members, representing over 200,000 municipalities and regions in Europe, are grouped by national delegation and by political group.

The Congress has produced a number of conventions on which it founds its action, including the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

It is the municipal and regional authorities' voice within the Council of Europe and works on the promotion of local and regional democracy and citizens' participation in Europe.

It keeps regular watch on the state of local and regional democracy in the 46 member states.

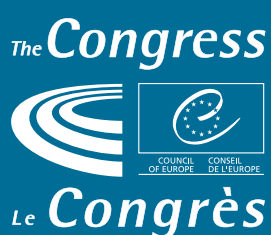
It promotes the transfrontier and inter-regional cooperation, notably through the creation of a new type of Euroregions, involving both member and non-member countries of the European Union.

It organises local and regional election observation missions.

It advises the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on all aspects of local and regional policies in Europe.



www.coe.int/congress



Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
Tel.: +33 (0)3 88 41 21 10
congress.web@coe.int
www.coe.int/congress



Publication: January 2009

Editing: Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
of the Council of Europe

Graphic Design: SPDP Council of Europe

Photos: Council of Europe