

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 304 (2010)¹ Priorities of the Congress for 2011-2012

1. In October 2010, at the 19th Session, the newly elected Congress members will fix the priorities of the Congress for the coming two years.

2. In the light of this, the Congress,

a. having examined the draft priorities 2011-2012, as found in the appendix to this text, marks its full support for the orientations set out in this document;

b. invites the Bureau of the Congress to prepare a revised text in time for the 19th Session of the Congress, following its consultations on this subject with the national associations of local and regional authorities.

Appendix

Priorities of the Congress 2011-2012

1. The Congress is the Council of Europe's assembly of local and regional representatives, a political body of territorial representatives who hold an elected mandate in their own country.

2. Its mission is to be a watchdog for local and regional democracy in Europe, a partner of governments and a reference point for territorial democracy, notably through monitoring the European Charter of Local Self-Government, through political dialogue with the Committee of Ministers and with local, regional and national authorities of member states. It also develops special thematic work through its recommendations and resolutions.

3. In 2011-2012 the Congress will further align its activities and strategy with the priorities of the Council of Europe, focusing its work to develop local and regional democracy in five areas, at the same time taking account of the reforms initiated by Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland and supported by the Committee of Ministers. It will adapt its structures accordingly.

4. In accordance with its revised co-operation agreement with the European Union Committee of the Regions (12 November 2009), the Congress will endeavour to translate these priorities through the Contact Group in a joint work programme with the committees of the Committee of the Regions, primarily the Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX).

I. Monitoring: a new dynamic

5. The Congress will bring a new dynamic to its monitoring activities, making them more frequent, more regular, more systematic and more open to political dialogue, enabling the

Congress to fulfil its mission as a monitoring body of the Council of Europe. These activities have to be co-ordinated with the other Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms, to ensure greater impact and tangible developments in member states.

6. The cornerstone of the monitoring activities of the Congress remains the benchmark Council of Europe treaty, the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which sets standards for both local and regional democracy in the Council of Europe states parties. At the same time the Congress will be widening and deepening the scope of its monitoring activities to take into account the Council of Europe Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, approved by the Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government in Utrecht in 2009, and Congress Resolution 296 (2010) on the role of local and regional authorities in the implementation of human rights, adopted as part of the follow-up to the Forum for the Future of Democracy's Sigtuna conference.

II. Election observation: widening the scope

7. The citizens' right to exercise their democratic choice in free and fair local elections is the *sine qua non* of democracy. It is a prerequisite to the health of local communities within a genuinely democratic society. Above all it is the first step in the political participation that is enshrined in the preamble to the European Charter of Local Self-government and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

8. An election is not just one day: it is far more than the act of voting, it includes the campaign and the complex process of enabling citizens to make an informed choice in a pluralistic political landscape. To make an accurate assessment of the conduct of the election, the whole process needs to be examined, including the political, legal and media systems. The Congress will therefore systematise its practice of conducting pre-electoral missions, to ensure a proper understanding of the context and process of elections. Co-operation will be developed with the relevant Council of Europe bodies in this respect. In carrying out its election observation mission, the Congress will continue to involve the Committee of the Regions of the European Union in developing its observation capacity. It will also continue to co-operate, when appropriate, with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). To ensure the effectiveness of election observation the Congress will continue to implement political follow-up to its recommendations and resolutions.

III. Targeted post-monitoring and observation assistance

9. To achieve real results with respect to the recommendations of its monitoring and election observation missions, the Congress will organise specific co-operation programmes with the member states concerned to address the major issues that it has highlighted as requiring attention and to increase their know-how and capacity for local governance and election organisation.

10. Such programmes should involve local and regional representatives, not just those of the countries concerned, but also those from other European countries who are willing to share their *acquis* and expertise on a peer-to-peer basis.

11. The Congress will seek to co-finance such activities through voluntary contributions and support from the European Union and other international partners.

IV. The new local dimension of human rights

12. Human rights are not exclusively the concern of national authorities. The respect of human rights has to be addressed at the local level. It is a key responsibility of territorial authorities, interdependent with good local and regional governance.

13. In accordance with its 2008 joint declaration with the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the Congress will work to make local and regional authorities aware of their responsibilities for the implementation of human rights. It is the role of local and regional authorities to ensure that their activities are fully compliant with Council of Europe human rights standards, such as, for instance, ensuring equal access to public services. We need to ensure that our communities are providing the same protection to all persons living in their territories.

14. In this respect, the Congress will promote the implementation of good practices and mechanisms of mediation, such as independent local and regional ombudsmen.

V. Streamlining thematic activities

15. The Congress will reorientate its thematic activities within its statutory committees in the light of the core values of the Council of Europe and of the reform of the Congress.

16. These activities will treat issues that are addressed during the monitoring activities of the Congress, notably the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy and related human rights issues, such as the full participation of all citizens in local political life and the related questions of equality of opportunity in local life and freedom of assembly and expression.

17. In implementing these objectives the Congress will bear in mind the need to avoid overlap and duplication of work and instead to develop synergies with other relevant Council of Europe bodies, such as the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) and the Council of Europe Centre of Expertise for Local Self-Government Reform.

1. Debated and adopted by the Standing Committee on behalf of the Congress on 18 June 2010 (see Document CG(18)15, explanatory memorandum presented by I. Micallef, Malta (L, EPP/CD), rapporteur).