

ACTIVITY REPORT

(December 2017 to April 2018)



Communication by the Secretary General of the Congress of Local and regional Authorities

At the 1314th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies

18 April 2018

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Activity Report of the Congress

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Communication by Andreas KIEFER, Secretary General of the Congress



Twice a year the Congress Secretary General presents a report on the activities of the Congress, its members and its secretariat to the Committee of Ministers' Deputies, which complements the annual political exchange of views of the Deputies with the President of the Congress. This introduction is based on the communication delivered when presenting the first activity report for 2018 on 18 April 2018

The 34th Session and the role of the Congress

The 34th Congress Session, under the theme "RIGHTS-BASED GOVERNANCE AT LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL", from 26 – 28 March 2018, encapsulated perfectly what the Congress is and what its work as a political body of local and regional elected representatives is about. Let me summarise it in five points:

1.

As a forum of political exchange, it held debates among its members and exchanged with the political leaders of the Organisation, with other Council of Europe actors and with academia to find solutions for the challenges our societies and our values are facing.

In particular it held an exchange with the Danish Minister for Economic Affairs and the Interior, Simon Emil AMMITZBØLL-BILLE, on behalf of the Chair of the Committee of Ministers, with the President of the Parliamentary Assembly Michele NICOLETTI, with the Special Representative of the Secretary General for migration and refugees Tomas BOCEK and with Nils MUIŽNIEKS, *former – at the time outgoing - Commissioner for Human Rights*, whose last official appearance in a CoE body, was with the Congress what for we are very grateful to him.

2.

As an advisory body for the Committee of Ministers, it adopted several recommendations (see list in the appendices). I would like to especially mention the one on the situation of unaccompanied refugee children and the role of local authorities in this regard.

The Council of Europe does not only happen in Strasbourg – it needs its follow-up in the member states. We therefore welcome the good practice in some member states, where the Congress delegation invites members of the PACE delegation, of the MfA and of the ministry responsible for the participation in the CDDG (Steering Committee for Democracy and Governance) to discuss "CoE

matters". This creates a team spirit for the Council of Europe in our member states and this is what the Organisation needs to be effective, beyond the intergovernmental work.

3.

As a Council of Europe monitoring body, the Congress is responsible for preparing assessment reports for the Committee of Ministers about the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government by Member States and the observation of local and regional elections.

As part of the regular monitoring of the situation of local and regional democracy in Europe, members examined the reports on local democracy in the smaller Council of Europe member States, namely Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino. These reports were followed by a debate on the specific challenges these countries face in implementing the Charter, with the participation of Antoni MARTÍ PETIT, Head of Government of the Principality of Andorra, Guerrino ZANOTTI, Minister of Internal Affairs of San Marino, Patrice CELLARIO, Minister of the Interior of the Principality of Monaco and Silvio PARNIS, Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government and Communities of Malta. The report on the situation of local democracy in Latvia was debated in the presence of Jānis EGLĪTS, Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry for Environmental Protection and Regional Development.

The Congress also adopted a report on local elections in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and heard an information report on local elections in Georgia both held in October 2017.

In this context of election observation I would like to mention a practical guide called "Administrative resources and fair elections" which presents good behaviour to prevent misuse of administrative resources. The guide was presented a week ago in a parliamentary seminar on the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes held in Tirana – jointly organised by the Parliamentary Assembly, the Venice Commission and the Congress.

The results of a fact-finding mission on the situation of local elected representatives in the Republic of Moldova was also discussed.

The Chamber of Regions held debates on the regional identity and integrity of the nation-state and on regional referenda as a tool for democracy: challenges and risks. The Chamber of Local Authorities held a debate on the situation of "Mayors under pressure" which examined some of the most important challenges being faced by local elected representatives today.

4.

The Congress as an operational body implements the local and regional dimension in territorial and thematic Council of Europe action plans focusing on political actors in municipalities, cities and regions. The objective is not just to change legislation, but to contribute to a sustainable change of mind-set and culture in local and regional councils and executives and to implement Council of Europe values at grassroots level.

We base our work on the good practices in the municipalities and regions represented in the Congress. The co-operation activities of the Congress are built on peer to peer activities: Unlike other – commercial – service providers the Congress bases its operational activities on the results of its thematic and monitoring reports, on the findings of other Council of Europe (monitoring) bodies and on the values and standards the Council of Europe stands for. These operational activities, firmly grounded in the statutory work of the Congress, contribute in concrete terms to improving the situation on the ground.

To this end the Congress published a series of booklets for local politicians on management of change and on transparency and citizen participation. More details and links to download these brochures are available in Chapter VII, Co-operation programmes and Action Plans, of this activity report.

5.

The Congress is part of the distribution chain of Council of Europe values and policies:

Members discussed the role of local and regional elected representatives and officials in integrating a human rights dimension into their daily work and presented a practical handbook to promote the dissemination of examples of good practice implemented by local and regional authorities in Europe.

It always goes without saying that respect and delivery of human rights begin in the municipalities and cities! They are the net with many knots – a net, which is resilient to threats to democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It is in this granting of rights and in disseminating awareness of them that local and regional authorities are truly irreplaceable.

Other aspects from the Session

In the larger framework of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union, the Congress held an exchange of views with Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ, President of the European Committee of the Regions. On this occasion the Presidents of the Congress and of the Committee of the Regions signed a revised co-operation agreement focusing the work on synergies and to make best use of each other's findings while avoiding duplication. An of common interest is to make best use of what is known as Multi-Level Governance. It is a concept that complex situations need differentiated approaches for solutions. Multi-Level Governance means respect of the responsibility of each authority involved (European, national, regional and local) and acknowledgement of the real capacity to deliver, to actually take the concrete measures. The situation of refugees and migrant is one example that the system can only work, if all levels perform properly, according to their real capacity.

As we have done for several years, we also welcomed a group of forty-two youth delegates, who are invited to take part in all of our debates and meetings in both sessions this year.

Due to the difficult financial situation, however, the session had to be shortened by half a day which forced us to postpone items to the next session and often to shorten speaking times for members.

Working conditions

The budgetary situation of the Organisation also has a concrete impact on the statutory functioning and the thematic work of the Congress and on the secretariat. Members referred to this in their questions to the representative of the Danish Chair of the Committee of Ministers and to the President of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Concrete impact of the – on-going – financial difficulties can be seen in different examples:

- postponement of several monitoring missions thereby extending the usual rhythm of five years between each national report up to seven years. We have to bear in mind that all 47 member states have ratified the European Charter for Local Self-Government and that therefore the monitoring activities have increased significantly in the last 10 years. *At the same time the share of the Congress budget in the overall CoE budget was reduced from 2.9 to presently 2.66 per cent.*
- inability to accept invitations to observe local and regional elections in member states in a meaningful way. In many cases we have had to limit the missions to small delegations (example of the first ever local elections where we could only organise a restricted mission) and in several others to decline the invitation due to a lack of resources.
- inability to organise key thematic meetings like the – up until now – annual summit of mayors against radicalisation. This is a development we really deplore because the annual event sparked activities in other cities. National governments repeatedly underlined the importance of local action in this respect and the event will be missed.
- reduction of the support for the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma inclusion. In this context I would like to thank the Austrian authorities for having – once more – seconded an official (called “person doing memorial service”) to support this important work.
- dramatic impact on the Congress secretariat: due to the specific circumstances and due to the rules and decisions taken presently more than 20 per cent of the 36 posts in the Congress secretariat cannot be filled on a permanent basis. The absences are partly replaced by temporary contracts but the frozen middle management posts cannot be replaced by temporary staff.

Reform: a new Congress: more relevant and indispensable than ever before

- How to address the difficult situation?

- How to make sure, that the Congress can continue to fulfil the tasks conferred upon it by the governments of the member states? I refer to the five dimensions I presented at the beginning of my statement: The Congress as
 - o a forum of political exchange
 - o a consultative body for the Committee of Ministers
 - o a monitoring body
 - o an operational structure and
 - o part of the distribution chain of Council of Europe policies and programmes.
- How to achieve budgetary sustainability?

In 2010 the Congress undertook a substantial reform. It decided to focus on the core business of the Council of Europe and to abandon areas, where the Council of Europe has no legal instruments in its toolbox and where other actors are working successfully. It decided to reduce the number of committees from four to three and to abandon policy areas in order to be able to perform in others in a meaningful way. This brought more focus, more quality and more relevance. And it paved the way for developing co-operation activities, implementing projects and recruiting staff in the framework of territorial and thematic Council of Europe Action Plans.

With the effects of the on-going zero nominal growth policy and with the change of the status of Turkey, however, the Congress finds itself in a situation where the statutory work is threatened – both in qualitative and in quantitative terms. Congress members want to contribute in a meaningful way by adding the local and regional dimension to the work of the Council of Europe but this is at risk.

The Bureau of the Congress has therefore established a Strategic Steering Group (Group de Pilotage Strategique – GPS). Its tasks are to develop proposals for the Bureau in order

- to safeguard the institutional role and functioning of the Congress and
- to make the Congress budget more sustainable.

How will the Congress be able to perform its statutory functions, its monitoring activities, deliver meaningful and useful recommendations to member States and contribute as a body of elected local and regional politicians to the implementation of the values of the Organisation on the ground?

You could call this the long-term activities, the marathon dimension, which is not always visible and does not create a lot of noise: but it is the bedrock and cornerstone of our work – as it is for the CoE as a whole! This establishes the indispensable basis for the successful impact of what the Council of Europe is about and to reach out to the citizens.

At the same time the Congress aims at retaining a capacity to react to ad hoc and temporary challenges and crises, to provide thematic input and operational activities concerning major topics such as those we have seen in the last few years, like radicalisation leading to terrorism, like the refugee crisis, like the challenges for the reception and integration of migrants, refugees and their families. You could call this “sprinter qualities”, rapid reaction for a limited period of time.

The Congress needs and wants to retain the ability to deliver meaningful work, based on representativity of the 47 different realities at grassroots in our member states and taking into account the resources needed and available. To deliver in both dimensions: marathon and sprint!

What are the issues to address?

We will look into working methods, procedures and especially examine the areas where most savings can be made and funds can be freed to cover the kernel, the really essential tasks. The Congress members heard the speeches of the Danish Chair and of the President of PACE, who both explained the situation of the Organisation. As we see no movement from member States towards leaving the zero nominal growth (ZNG) policy, it is only responsible to safeguard the statutory work by a far reaching re-organisation of the Congress.

We expect that the Steering Group “GPS” will be able to present concrete proposals to the Bureau in June which will then be discussed and presented to the Session in November 2018 or at the latest in March 2019. The Committee of Ministers is then invited to endorse the proposals and to amend the Statutory Resolution and the Charter of the Congress accordingly.

On this basis the “new Congress” can become operational at its renewal session in October 2020. The process for the renewal will be launched by the Council of Europe secretariat at the end of 2019. We are aware that the consultation and nomination procedures within member States require some time and political negotiations but we are confident that we will succeed.

And for this project, dear Ambassadors, for establishing a renewed Congress, we need your support: For a Congress which has grown in experience, in relevance and in impact over the 25 years of its existence. For a Congress which has learned its lessons and proved its usefulness – and, indeed, its indispensability.

I. POLITICAL AGENDA



High level meeting with the European Committee of the Regions

Brussels, 16 January 2018

At its third meeting, the High-Level Group of the Congress and of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) took stock of their recent and current cooperation activities, and discussed common priorities for 2018. (see VI. EXTERNAL COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS).

Statement by Congress President following the death of a Georgian citizen

Strasbourg, 27 February 2018

Following the death of Archil TATUNASHVILI, a Georgian citizen who was being detained by the de facto authorities in Tskhingvali, Congress President Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM declared: "I would like to join with the entire international community in expressing my outrage and sorrow at this tragic event." She urged for a transparent investigation to establish the circumstances behind his death and the responsibility for this act and called for the immediate release of the two people detained with Mr TATUNASHVILI, and their placement under the authority of the legitimate government in Tbilisi. The Congress President also underlined the Congress' long-standing support for Georgia's territorial integrity.

Signature of a new Co-operation Agreement between the Congress and the European Committee of the Regions

Strasbourg, 27 March 2018

During the 34th Congress session, Congress President Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM and President of the European Committee of the Regions Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ signed a revised Co-operation Agreement to replace the existing Agreement of 2009. On this occasion, the Congress members held an exchange of views with the President of the European Committee of the Regions on the co-operation between the two institutions (see VI. EXTERNAL COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS).

Statement to mark the International Roma Day

Strasbourg, 8 April 2018,

In its declaration, the Congress invites mayors around Europe to sign the Declaration against Anti-Gypsyism which was adopted during the 32nd Congress Session in March 2017. John WARMISHAM

(United Kingdom, SOC), Congress Spokesperson on Roma and Travellers stressed the importance of keeping up the fight anti-Gypsyism at the local and regional level and underlined that the Declaration is a political statement, by which mayors and councillors express their will to reject all forms of discrimination, violence, harassment and incitement to hatred against Roma and Travellers in their municipalities or regions. By signing it, they commit themselves to refrain from any political alliance building or co-operation with political parties or authorities that incite racial or ethnic prejudices. Until now, 83 representatives from 32 member states have signed the declaration against anti-Gypsyism, with the municipalities of Şişli (Turkey), Volos (Greece) and Gliwice (Poland) being among the latest signatories.

II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES



A. 34th SESSION OF THE CONGRESS

The members of the Congress met on 27 and 28 March 2018 for the 34th Session whose overarching theme was “rights-based governance at local and regional level”.

They discussed, in particular, the role of local and regional elected representatives and officials in integrating the human rights dimension into their daily work and adopted a resolution to promote the dissemination of examples of good practice implemented by local and regional authorities throughout Europe. Human Rights Commissioner Nils MUIŽNIEKS and Roland-François WEIL of the UNHCR Representation to the European institutions in Strasbourg participated in this debate. The role and responsibilities of local authorities with regard to unaccompanied refugee children was also the subject of a debate in the presence of Tomáš BOČEK, Special Representative of the Secretary General on migration and refugees.

As part of the Congress’ regular monitoring of the situation of local and regional democracy in Europe, members examined the reports on local democracy in the smaller Council of Europe member States, namely Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino. Patrice CELLARIO, Minister of the Interior of the Principality of Monaco made a statement following the debate on the report on Monaco.

A debate was then held on the common challenges faced by smaller states in implementing the European Charter of Local Self-Government with the participation of Antoni MARTÍ PETIT, Head of Government of the Principality of Andorra, Guerrino ZANOTTI, Minister of Internal Affairs of San Marino and Silvio PARNIS, Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government and Communities of Malta. The debate concluded that complying with the Charter enables these “smaller member States” to speak to all European countries as equals. Of a size closer to a local authority than a State, they are often models of local democracy. Introducing the debate, constitutional law specialist and member of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government (GIE) Tania GROPPi pointed out that their experience of these local authorities as a counterweight is an example to be retained.

A report on the situation of local and regional democracy in Latvia was debated, followed by an exchange of views with Jānis EGLĪTS, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of Latvia. Also on the agenda was a report on local elections in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (15 October 2017) and an information report on local elections in Georgia (21 October 2017). In addition, the results of the fact-finding mission on the situation of local elected representatives in the Republic of Moldova were presented.

A debate on “mayors under pressure” provided an overview of the difficulties faced by mayors in carrying out their mandate and two debates focused on regional challenges: the first one examined

regional identity and the integrity of the nation-State and the second looked at the regional referendum as a democratic tool (see II. C. THE CHAMBERS).

In addition, an exchange of views was held with Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ, President of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) followed by the signing of a revised co-operation agreement between the CoR and the Congress (see VI. EXTERNAL COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS).

40 young delegates chosen from 40 Council of Europe member States – youth activists, youth workers, students and young political leaders – also participated as part of the Congress's ongoing initiative to promote youth engagement in politics.

Among the guests who also held an exchange of views with the Congress members were Simon Emil AMMITZBØLL-BILLE, Minister for Economic Affairs and the Interior of Denmark, on behalf of the Danish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers and Michele NICOLETTI, President of the Parliamentary Assembly (see V. INSTITUTIONAL CO-OPERATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE).

B. THE BUREAU

Strasbourg, 2nd February 2018

The Bureau of the Congress met to discuss the agenda of the 34th Session and adopted the draft co-operation agreement with the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) with a view to its signature at this session. In addition, the Bureau discussed the revision of Congress Rules and Procedures to include a code of conduct for Congress members. This revision is part of the Congress's work to promote ethics and prevent corruption at local and regional level. Several reports on these issues will be discussed at the 35th Session in November 2018.

The Director of the Congress presented the budgetary situation of the Congress and future prospects, in the difficult context facing the Council of Europe as a whole. The Bureau approved the setting-up of a Strategic Steering Group to consider the possibilities for far-reaching reform of the Congress so as to make its budget sustainable and safeguard its political role and means of action in the future.

Strasbourg, 26 March 2018

The Bureau considered the draft agenda of the 34th session and approved the composition of a working group on Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), where no local elections have been held for 10 years. A fact-finding visit is due to take place at the end of the first half of 2018. The EU's Committee of the Regions (CoR) will contribute to the group's work.

Other items on the agenda included local and regional democracy in the Republic of Moldova and in Turkey, the local elections in the Netherlands, to which the Congress sent an observer team (21 March 2018) and the European Local Democracy Week.

The Congress Secretary General also set out the prospects for future operational activities in Ukraine, Morocco and Tunisia, where the Congress might send a team to observe the local elections (6 May 2018). In addition, he presented the handbook on change management and the handbook on transparency, two tools drawn up on the basis of co-operation activities conducted in several countries and made available to local and regional elected representatives.

C. THE CHAMBERS

The Chamber of Local Authorities

The Chamber of Local Authorities held its 34th Session on 28 March 2018. In his communication, President Anders KNAPE (Sweden, EPP/CCE) welcomed the presentation of reports on the observation of local elections in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and in Georgia, while regretting that the current financial constraints prevented the Congress from conducting more missions of this type. Referring to the thematic debate, he observed that the Chamber had been receiving more and more complaints by mayors and city councillors claiming that they had been the object of threats and intimidation.

Following the presentation of a report on the local elections in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" presented by Karim VAN OVERMEIRE (Belgium, NR), the Chamber held a debate and called for the national authorities to ensure de facto participation of women in grassroots politics, to

pay further attention to the issue of accuracy of voters' lists and to recognize the need of financial resources of municipalities. At the same time it recognized that there have been improvements with respect to the situation of the media in the country.

The Chamber also discussed the municipal elections in Georgia, on the basis of a fact-finding mission report, presented by Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, ILDG) and Jos WIENEN (Netherlands, EPP/CCE). The Congress referred to the reform potential of the Georgian electoral law and proposed further steps towards a less complicated electoral system.

Finally, the Congress had a debate on the theme "Mayors under pressure" with statements of Elena GRITCO, councillor at the Balti Municipal Council (Republic of Moldova), Leyla IMRET, former mayor of Cizre (Turkey) and Patrick KLUGMAN, Deputy Mayor of Paris in charge of International Relations and Francophonie in the International Observatory of Mayors in Danger. Participants discussed the many difficulties that mayors and city councilors face in carrying out their mandate, and more particularly, the growing political pressure exerted by national authorities on local authorities.

The Chamber of Regions

The Chamber of Regions held its 34th Session in Strasbourg on 28 March 2018. Its President Gunn Marit HELGESEN (Norway, EPP/CCE) presented her communication where she proposed avenues of reflection on the reform of the Chamber as part of the broader Congress reform, and invited Chamber members to contribute their insight to this process.

The Chamber held debates on the themes of regional identity and the integrity of the State as well as challenges and risks of the regional referendum as a tool for democracy, considering the existing tensions and sensitivity around these issues, and their potential of producing far-reaching consequences for Europe.

The guest speakers for the session were Luis LEITE RAMOS, General Rapporteur on local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly; Ana Luísa PEREIRA LUIS, President of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE) and President of the Parliament of the Açores (Portugal); Simona GRANATA-MENGHINI, Deputy Secretary of the Venice Commission; Marthe FATIN-ROUGE STEFANINI, Director of Research of the National Centre of Scientific Research (CNRS) in Aix-Marseille University; and Stefano BONACCINI, President of the Emilia Romagna Region (Italy) and President of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

Members speaking in the first debate stressed the specificities of their regions as a source of strength for the State, and proposed solutions to uphold the unique character of regional identities, emphasising that the threat to territorial integrity regional was a lack of trust and political disconnect between the centre and the region. The Chamber President concluded the debate by summing up the Congress' position with the motto "different within integrity".

In the debate on regional referenda, Marthe FATIN-ROUGE STEFANINI presented the referendum mechanism and its related challenges and risks; Simona GRANATA-MENGHINI recalled the international standards for holding referenda; and Stefano BONACCINI presented the examples of regional referenda in Italy, touching also upon the municipal referenda supervised by the regions. Speakers in the debate underlined the importance of dialogue within the constitutional framework, as well as the need for citizens to be well informed and understand the consequences of their vote. The conclusions of the debate were unanimous in support of democratic participation and consultation – within the respect of the constitutions and of the rule of law.

D. THE COMMITTEES

Monitoring Committee

The Monitoring Committee met on 14 February 2018 in Strasbourg under the Chairmanship of Leen VERBEEK (the Netherlands, SOC) and decided to defer the monitoring visits to Albania, Azerbaijan and Ukraine to 2019, due to the financial situation of the Organisation. It approved draft recommendations on local democracy in Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, Liechtenstein and Latvia, as well as draft recommendation issued from a fact-finding report on the situation of local elected representatives in the Republic of Moldova.

After a substantial and lively exchange of views, the Committee members also approved a draft resolution on promoting human rights at local and regional levels, which will give rise in the course of

2018 to a handbook aiming at presenting a collection of good practice by local and regional authorities on refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers, LGBTI and roma and travellers.

In addition, the Committee approved a draft recommendation on the observation of municipal elections in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” conducted on 15 October 2017, and took note of the information report on the electoral assessment mission in Georgia conducted on 21 October 2017.

Lastly, the Committee nominated Majlinda BUFI (Albania, SOC) as a full member and Gyorgy ILLES (Hungary, ILDG) as a substitute to the Reflection Group tasked with preparing a new concept for the European Local Democracy Week.

The next meeting of the Monitoring Committee is scheduled for 28 June 2018 in the municipality of Büyükçekmece in Turkey.

Governance Committee

During its meeting on Tuesday 27 March 2018, in Strasbourg, In the margin of the 34th Session, the Committee, chaired by Jean-Louis TESTUD (France, EPP/CCE), discussed the draft “Guidelines on the right of local authorities to be consulted by higher levels of government”, which underline the importance of having effective and efficient systems of consultation in member states to achieve better decisions and quality governance at local and national levels.

The Committee also examined draft reports on “Protecting Whistle-blowers”, “Coping with the debt burden: local authorities in financial difficulty”, “Financial compensation of local and regional elected representatives and public officials in the exercise of their office”, and “Fair distribution of taxes in trans frontier areas”. In addition, the Committee continued the preparation of its conference on “The use of languages by local and regional authorities” which will take place on 31 May 2018, in Bálványos, Covasna County (Romania). The Committee will next meet on the eve of the conference on 30 May.

Current Affairs Committee

The meeting of the Current Affairs Committee took place on 27 March in the margins of the 34th session of the Congress under the presidency of Gabrielle NEFF (Germany, ILDG). Members heard a progress report from Rena DOUROU (Greece, SOC) on the report “Border regions facing the migration phenomenon” for which a reflection group bringing together experts and INGO representatives was set up to further examine the issue before adoption at the Committee’s next meeting. Members’ attention was drawn to the situation of refugees in the City of Livadia (Greece) through a video presentation explaining the practical measures taken for hosting refugee families, prepared by Panagiou POULOU (Greece, SOC), mayor of Livadia.

Members were also informed that due to budget restrictions, the 4th edition of the Summit of Mayors for the 'Alliance of European cities against violent extremism' would be postponed to 2019. The Summit, organised annually in cooperation with the European Forum for Urban Security, brings together mayors, local and regional councillors, experts and representatives of civil society to look at good practices for preventing extremist violence.

The Committee will next meet in Strasbourg on 19 June 2018.

III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY

A. MONITORING ACTIVITIES



The core mission of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is the effective monitoring of the situation of local and regional democracy in member States by assessing the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted in 1985 and ratified by the 47 member States of the Council of Europe.

Monitoring visits

Since December 2017, the Congress undertook the following two monitoring visits

Lithuania (23 - 24 January 2018)

Rapporteurs Artur TORRES PEREIRA (Portugal, EPP/CCE) and Sigurdur Bjorn BLONDAL (Iceland, ILDG), examined the situation of local democracy in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the country in 1999. High-level meetings were scheduled, in particular, with the Minister of the Interior, and the Minister of Finance.

The delegation also met with the Chair of the Committee on State Administration and Local Authorities of the Seimas, the Auditor General for the State Audit Office and the President of the Constitutional Court. The rapporteurs held discussions with the Mayor of Kaunas, the Mayor of Kaunas District Municipality, the Mayor of Elektrėnai municipality and Vilnius City councillors. They also exchanged views with the National Delegation of Lithuania to the Congress and the leaders of the Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania and the Lithuanian Rural Communities Union.

The draft report will be examined and submitted for approval at the Monitoring Committee meeting in June 2018, before its submission for adoption by the Congress, at its autumn session in 2018.

Slovenia (20 - 22 February 2018)

The Congress delegation examined the situation of local democracy in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the country in 1996. The Rapporteurs Gaye DOGANOGLU (Turkey, EPP/CCE) and Henrik Brade JOHANSEN (Denmark, ILDG) focused on the developments in the field of local democracy occurred since the adoption of the last Congress recommendation on local and regional democracy in Slovenia, on 18 October 2011. Meetings were held, in particular, with the State Secretary of Public Administration, the State Secretary of Finance, the President of the National Assembly and the President of the National Council.

The rapporteurs also met the President of the Constitutional Court and the Human rights Ombudsman. The delegation held discussions with the National Delegation of Slovenia to the Congress and the President of the Association of municipalities of Slovenia. The rapporteurs also

exchanged views with the Mayor of Ljubljana, the Mayor of Koper and representatives of the municipality of Ankaran.

The draft report will be examined and submitted for approval at the Monitoring Committee meeting in June 2018, before its submission for adoption by the Congress, at its autumn session in 2018.

Recommendations adopted

In the course of its 34th Session (27 - 28 March 2018), the Congress adopted the five following recommendations:

Recommendation 412 on the situation of Local and regional democracy in Latvia

The Congress adopted this recommendation prepared by co-rapporteurs, Xavier CADORET (France, SOC) and Marc COOLS (Belgium, ILDG) following a monitoring visit to the country from 12 to 14 September 2017. The rapporteurs welcomed an overall positive situation of local self-government, together with the extensive autonomy of local authorities they underlined the significant endeavours concerning decentralization that Latvia put in place during the last twenty years. They welcomed the fact that State intervention in local affairs is strictly limited and regulated by the law, and praised, in particular, the systematic references made in the Constitutional Court's case-law to the European Charter of Local Self-Government which was ratified by Latvia in 1996, thus ensuring its applicability. They also welcomed the fruitful dialogue and negotiation between the central government and the local authorities.

Nevertheless, their report highlighted several points which need to be examined by the authorities of Latvia in order to further improve the democratic framework, in particular the clarification of the system of competences and the need to ensure that local authorities have full discretion to manage their own competences. The granting of longer time-spans for consultation mechanisms of local authorities, in order to make them more effective, was equally pointed out in the report.

The Congress recommends that the Latvian authorities grant voting rights to local elections for non-citizens to guarantee a better exercise of political rights by this part of the population. The Congress also invites the authorities to ratify the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

Recommendation 415 on the situation of local democracy in Andorra

The Congress adopted this recommendation drafted after the first monitoring visit carried out in Andorra by the co-rapporteurs, Gaye DOGANOGLU (Turkey, EPP/CCE) and Zdenek BROZ (Czech Republic, ECR), in April 2017. The rapporteurs stressed that a well-established dialogue between the central and local authorities, as well as representation of municipalities in the Parliament set a high bar for other states. The monitoring visit allowed them to observe how local self-government functions in a country with a small surface area.

However the rapporteurs recommend the city of Andorra la Vella should be granted a special status, on the basis of Congress Recommendation 219 (2007), establishing different legal arrangements to take account of the particular situation of the Capital city compared to other municipalities. They also recommended to the Andorran authorities to formalise in law the mechanism of consultation of local authorities by the central authorities which would further safeguard the right of local authorities to be consulted on all matters that concern them directly.

The Congress suggests Andorran authorities to consider ratifying the provisions of the Charter on commensurate fiscal resources and on financial equalisation, as well as signing the Additional Protocol to the Charter on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

Recommendation 416 on the situation of local democracy in Liechtenstein

The Congress adopted this recommendation drafted following a monitoring visit on 6 and 7 June 2017 to the municipalities of Vaduz, Triesenberg and Planken by co-rapporteurs, Artur TORRES PEREIRA (Portugal, EPP/CCE) and Marie KAUFMANN (Czech Republic, ILDG). Their report underlines the good level of local democracy in Liechtenstein, in particular, the healthy financial situation of local authorities and the co-operation between central and local governments.

The report nevertheless draws attention to areas for improvement concerning the approval of municipal budgets and of local development plans, which does not allow the powers of local authorities to be full and exclusive. The Congress calls on the Liechtenstein authorities to clarify the allocation of powers between central government and the municipalities as regards planning and

development and to abolish the system of government approval of local budgets. It recommends that they formalise in law the mechanism for consulting local authorities so as to better preserve their autonomy.

Recommendation 417 on the situation of local democracy in Monaco

The Congress adopted this recommendation prepared by co rapporteur Marianne HOLLINGER (Switzerland, ILDG) Michalis ANGELOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CCE) after the first monitoring visit to Monaco since it ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 2013. Despite Monaco's small geographical size, local government is a long-established tradition in the country and the rapporteurs took the view that, bearing in mind its unusual situation, there is a generally very satisfactory level of local self-government in Monaco. They welcomed the good relations between the central government and the municipality of Monaco, which were facilitated by the small size of the country, and the fact that the law provided mechanisms for consulting the municipality, which had adequate administrative resources and more than adequate financial resources. In addition, administrative controls were strictly limited to ensuring compliance with the law.

Nevertheless, the Congress recommended the introduction of mechanisms to ensure that the municipal executive was politically accountable to the municipal council. At present, the mayor and deputy mayors could only be removed from office by a ministerial order. The national authorities were also encouraged to put in place a mechanism for consulting the municipality on the annual lump-sum appropriation to be allocated to it and to acknowledge its right to challenge the constitutionality of laws and their compatibility with the Charter.

Lastly, the Congress urged the Monegasque authorities to ratify certain articles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government which were respected de facto, as well as the Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

Recommendation 418 on the situation of local democracy in San Marino

The Congress adopted the recommendation drafted by co-rapporteurs Gunnar Axel AXELSSON (Iceland, SOC) and Harald BERGMANN (Netherlands, ILDG) after the first monitoring visit carried out in the country from 13 to 14 June 2017. The rapporteurs welcomed the reform process launched in the Republic of San Marino to bring local self-government in line with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. They evaluated positively the recognition of the legal personality of the township councils and of their right to recourse to judicial remedies. They likewise welcomed the establishing of the joint session of township representatives.

However, the rapporteurs drew attention to a number of areas where improvements are required: the allocation of a substantial share of public affairs to the responsibility of local authorities in line with the principle of subsidiarity, and the arrangement of the necessary legal, financial and administrative means to regulate and manage it. The Congress thus recommends a proper implementation of consultation procedures with local authorities in practice, as well as a clarification of the areas where the townships will have full and exclusive powers, and the full discretion to exercise their initiatives with regard to any matter within their competences. It also advocates the explicit recognition of the principle of local self-government at the constitutional level.

B. OBSERVATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS



Over the last 15 years, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has observed more than 100 local and regional elections in Council of Europe member States and occasionally also beyond. Such missions are conducted further to the invitation of the national authorities or competent electoral bodies and they complement the political monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Assistance in following-up to Congress' recommendations prepared further to observation missions can be provided through a post-electoral dialogue.

Observation missions

The Netherlands (19 - 22 March 2018)

A delegation headed by Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, ILDG), Congress Thematic Spokesperson on election observation, carried out this mission to assess the local elections held in the Netherlands on 21 March 2018. On E-Day, four Congress teams visited some 50 polling stations throughout the country and observed the voting for the members of Municipal Councils (Mayors being directly appointed by the King upon proposal from the Councils).

In a first statement, the Congress welcomed the good organisation of the Election Day, the transparency of the process and the atmosphere of trust in which these elections took place. The location of many polling stations was conducive to citizen participation, since voters could cast their ballot in any polling station within their constituency including also train stations, retirement homes, buses, boats or museums.

Preliminary conclusions of the delegation refer also to issues which should be addressed by the Dutch authorities in view of future elections: The lack of regulations for campaign financing at the local level has the potential to affect the level playing field between candidates in a negative way. Proxy voting – which has a long tradition in the country – could expose vulnerable groups, particularly women or migrants, to pressure regarding their electoral choice. As for the counting, electronic systems could be tested during future elections in order to speed up the process.

An Information Report is currently being prepared and will be discussed at the next meeting of the Congress Monitoring Committee in June 2018.

Texts adopted during the 34th Session (27 - 28 March 2018)

Information Report on municipal elections in Georgia

The Congress adopted this report on the observation of the municipal elections held in the country on 21 October 2017. Congress Rapporteur Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, ILDG) highlighted the overall well-administered Election Day, transparency of the electoral process and confidence in the

performance of the Central Election Commission. Mr DICKSON who carried out the Electoral Assessment Mission together with Barbara TOCE (Italy, SOC) and Jos WIENEN (Netherlands, EPP/CCE) underlined the good collaboration with the OSCE/ODIHR Mission, which allowed the visit of some 30 polling stations on Election Day and a well-coordinated deployment of observation teams.

In an electoral context marked by the clear dominance of the ruling party, the Rapporteur recalled that it was the first time that independent candidates were allowed to run for local elections. Such provision fostered a vivid election campaign and played a role in the media coverage marked by increasing professionalism. The Rapporteur also pointed to instances of misuse of administrative resources, which seems to be of specific relevance at the local level and included mobilisation and pressure allegedly exerted on public sector employees to vote in favour of the ruling party. The delegation received also reports about some irregularities at polling stations, in particular during the counting.

The Information Report recognises the amendments to the Election Code introduced in July 2017, but proposes further steps towards a less complicated electoral system. Moreover, in the light of the current Georgian legislation framework that allows voters with temporary registration to cast a ballot in local elections, the Rapporteur referred to Congress Recommendation 369 (2015) which provides that only voters who are permanently residing in a specific municipality should be enfranchised at the local level. Consequently, the Congress encourages the Georgian authorities to take this into consideration for future reforms and to complement their efforts to establish the accuracy of voters' lists.

Decentralisation and the strengthening of municipalities and regions are still in the early stages of development in Georgia. The Congress therefore pays special attention to financial independence as an instrumental mechanism for the further development of local authorities' capacities, especially in the situation of a high level of exodus from rural areas into the capital city Tbilisi.

Recommendation 413 on municipal elections in “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”

This recommendation followed the mission to observe the municipal elections in “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” held on 15 October 2017. Rapporteur Karim VAN OVERMEIRE (Belgium, NR), stressed that the elections were, by and large, well-organised and in line with international standards. He highlighted, in particular, improvement regarding the situation of the media, notably more balanced media coverage of the campaign and better working conditions for journalists.

However, despite these improvements, the rapporteur noted that the general atmosphere in the country is still characterised by deep division and polarisation along ethnic and political lines. He stressed the need for more transparency in the electoral process, which is relevant for the situation in the polling stations and at the level of the State Election Commission. According to him, it is particularly critical to ensure the separation of State and party interests, in order to provide a level playing field for all contestants, and to prevent the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes.

The Congress invites the authorities of “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” to pay further attention to the issue of accuracy of voters' lists and to ensure the effective participation of women in grassroots politics. Moreover, it recommends to improve the legal conditions for effective redress in electoral disputes in order to handle the complaints in an impartial manner. The Congress also encourages the authorities to organise training for electoral staff to ensure the coherent implementation of the legal framework.

Thematic seminars

A parliamentary seminar on the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes took place on 10-11 April in Tirana in Albania. The event was jointly organised by three Council of Europe bodies – the Parliamentary Assembly, the Venice Commission and the Congress– for the parliaments of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Stewart DICKSON presented the Checklist of criteria for compliance with international standards and good practice preventing misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes at local and regional level. This Checklist, approved by the Congress in 2017, aims to identify areas where there is a risk of misuse of administrative resources, to assess the implementation of the legal framework and to draw the attention of stakeholders to specific examples of such actions.

The Checklist of criteria served also as a basis for the publication by the Congress of a practical guide for local and regional officials and officials entitled “Administrative Resources and Fair Elections”.

Aimed at providing a practical understanding of the phenomenon, the guide includes the list of criteria but also a number of practical examples that were reported to Congress observers during election missions.

IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES



The Congress supports local authorities in the performance of their duties in respect of their citizens and it supports them in their search for solutions to the challenges they face, in particular in terms of security, integration, dialogue and participation, respect for fundamental human and social rights, and the inclusion of vulnerable populations.

It initiates reflections and projects on these topics and contributes actively to the work being done in this connection within the Council of Europe and at European level.

A. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The Pact of Cities and Regions to stop sexual abuse against children was signed on 23 March 2018 by Vladan VASIĆ, Mayor of Pirot in Serbia. The Pact is a tool developed by the Congress which provides a list of practical actions and policies to be implemented in order to set up child-friendly services, protect children and prevent them being exposed to sexual violence. The signatory cities undertake to develop initiatives in this regard. Today more than 60 cities, regions and associations have adhered to the Pact¹.

B. GENDER EQUALITY

The Congress President addressed the 9th Plenary Assembly of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) in Giza, Egypt on 21 February 2018, on the subject of women's empowerment and participation. Following the presentation of a report on "Women's empowerment in the Mediterranean region", she stressed the significant role played by women in the uprising wave in southern Mediterranean countries from 2011 who called on for more democracy and social justice, for fair and open systems that would respect and enact their rights within the society. Building upon the example of the Congress' internal rules allowing for a fair representation of women within the national delegations, she added that the obstacles to the participation of women are not only political and require a profound change in mentalities and cultures, rooted in centuries of tradition.

Within the project "Strengthening capacity of local elected authorities", the Congress organised with the Association of Ukrainian Cities, in Kyiv on 21 and 22 February 2018, a workshop on challenges and opportunities related to gender equality at local level in Ukraine. This event gathered together representatives of national and local authorities from Ukraine who debated and exchanged with peers

¹ <https://rm.coe.int/1680719fb4>

and representatives of national associations of local authorities from Finland, Italy, Serbia, Sweden, and the South-East of Europe (NALAS). Barbara TOCE, Vice-President of the Congress, underlined the crucial role of local authorities in integrating a gender perspective and equal opportunities in practices and procedures”

On the occasion of the International Women’s Day, the Congress co-organised a conference on “Women and Local Governance” on 7 March 2018 in Yerevan, Armenia, jointly with the Armenian Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, the United States Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Programme, the Embassy of Sweden in Armenia and the Communities Association of Armenia (CAA). The discussions focused on legal mechanisms for women’s economic empowerment as a prerequisite or contributing factor for their political participation. Addressing the conference, Carla DEJONGHE (Belgium, ILDG), Congress member and Deputy of the Brussels-Capital Regional Parliament, emphasised the importance of involving women in local politics to “make sure that needs of both women and men are taken into account when public policies are developed and implemented.

On the international Women’s Day, the President of the Congress also issued a statement (See I. POLITICAL AGENDA).

On 12 April 2018 in Strasbourg, the Secretary General of the Congress met the President of the Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe Eva Fehringer – on the occasion of the Commission meeting from 11 to 13 April - to discuss synergies and opportunities for the Congress to contribute to the dissemination of the work of the Council of Europe to cities and regions.

C. INCLUSION OF ROMA AND TRAVELLERS / EUROPEAN ALLIANCE OF CITIES AND REGIONS FOR THE INCLUSION OF ROMA AND TRAVELLERS

Following the setting up of the Ukrainian “Alliance of cities and regions on development of Roma initiatives” in Kiev in November 2017, the Alliance task force began preparations for a similar exercise in Greece. The Alliance was the focus of the conference “Strengthening Roma networks at the local and regional level” took place on 12 April 2018 in Athens with the participation of 35 Greek mayors and the associations of local and regional authorities as well as government officials. The Congress was represented by John WARMISHAM (United Kingdom, SOC), Congress Thematic Spokesperson for Roma and Travellers and Michail ANGELOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CCE), Vice President of the Chamber of Local Authorities.

The network is expected to become a central partner for the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion (which brings together 130 local and regional authorities from 29 member States) in their fight to combat anti-Gypsyism at local and regional level. The Congress adopted a “Declaration of mayors and elected local and regional representatives of Council of Europe member states against anti-Gypsyism” in 2017. Signed by 83 entities from 32 member States, it is a landmark text that helps local and regional authorities to position themselves explicitly against anti-Gypsyism and work for Roma Inclusion.

On the international Roma Day 8 April 2018, the Congress issued a statement to call on local and regional elected representatives to sign this Declaration. (See I. POLITICAL AGENDA)

D. EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK (ELDW)

The ELDW celebrated its 10th anniversary in October 2017, under the theme “Citizen participation, consultation and commitment: for a thriving local democracy”. More than 225 activities were organised by 74 partners from 20 countries. The results of the 10th anniversary edition were evaluated at the annual coordination meeting in Paris on 5 February 2018, with the participation of 45 partner cities from 6 countries (France, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Turkey and Ukraine) and national associations of local authorities.

On the occasion of the anniversary of the Week, the Congress adopted during its 33rd Session the Resolution 423 (2017) on “10 years of the European Local Democracy Week”, in which it decided to establish a Reflection Group tasked with taking the ELDW initiative forward to a new dimension. The composition of the Group was approved by the Congress Bureau on 2 February 2018 and included the Thematic Spokesperson and Deputy Spokesperson on the ELDW, a member and a substitute

nominated by each of the three Congress Committees, and a member and a substitute chosen from the former Youth Delegates of the Congress.

This Reflection Group held its first meeting on 27 March, during the 34th Session. Based on the comments from the ELDW partners and the Congress members, the Reflection Group outlined the main points at issue to be tackled in order to give a new momentum to this initiative: the Week's concept and format, the way of engaging new partners and sustaining their commitment, as well as the way of sharing and promoting best practices. Other meetings of the Reflection Group and consultation with national coordinators are envisaged in 2018 to reach agreement on the proposal for the future of the ELDW.

V. INSTITUTIONAL CO-OPERATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE



Simon Emil AMMITZBØLL-BILLE, Minister for Economic Affairs and the Interior of Denmark, on behalf of the Danish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

A. THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR

The Committee of Ministers

The Congress President and Secretary General hold regular exchanges of views and communications with the Ministers' Deputies. The Congress also contributes actively to the activities of the chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers.

On 28 March, the President of the Congress had a bilateral meeting with the Danish Minister of Economy and Interior Simon Emil AMMITZBØLL-BILLE, who also addressed the 34th session of the Congress on behalf of the Danish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. In his speech he highlighted the necessity of efficient local self-government and the promotion of direct citizen participation, as the main pillars of well-functioning local authorities. The Minister also drew up an overview of the Danish Chairmanship priorities and the role local and regional authorities could play in this regard, in particular in promoting the involvement of children and young people in democracy, with the long-term objective of shaping future, democratic citizens.

B. THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

The Congress holds regular exchanges with the Parliamentary Assembly, in order to increase co-operation at the level of rapporteurs and the respective secretariats as well as in areas of common interest, in particular in the framework of the implementation of Council of Europe Campaigns.

The President of the Congress attended the first part-session of the Parliamentary Assembly in January 2018 and met the government representatives invited to this session.

Parliamentary Assembly President Michele NICOLETTI addressed the Congress at the 34th session on 27 March. In his speech, he outlined the areas of common interest and co-operation between the Council of Europe Congress and Parliamentary Assembly and emphasised the role played by local and regional authorities in promoting democracy and the participation of civil society participation. He welcomed Congress initiatives aiming to preserve European unity and bring people together such as the Alliance of European cities against violent Extremism and the European Local Democracy Week.

The President of PACE then spoke with the President of the Congress at a bilateral meeting.

The General Rapporteur on local and regional authorities of the Parliamentary Assembly Luís LEITE RAMOS participated in a debate on “regional identity and integrity of the nation state” held on 28 March 2018 in the Chamber of Regions of the Congress. He highlighted the importance of regional identities in the development of many countries, while also emphasising that regional autonomy consists of exercising rights in line with national sovereignty. The Parliamentary Assembly will examine the matter of decentralisation again in October 2018, and Mr LEITE RAMOS called on the Congress to help it to “ease the tensions between states and regions” and to identify non-violent solutions. In his view, this would mean implementing consultation procedures, through a culture of dialogue and a shared desire to make progress, to which the Assembly intends to contribute actively, while building on the Congress’s experience in these matters.

C. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW

The Congress is working in close co-operation with the Venice Commission, particularly in the field of election observation and the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The Council for Democratic Elections (CED) is a platform for electoral cooperation between the Venice Commission, in its capacity as legal body, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress, as political organs responsible for election observation in their respective areas.

Members of the Congress on the Council for Democratic Elections are currently the thematic Spokespersons on the Observation of Local and Regional Elections, Jos WIENEN (Netherlands, EPP/CCE) and Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, ILDG).

Jos WIENEN and Stewart DICKSON took part in the 61st meeting of the Council for Democratic Elections in Venice on 15 March 2018. Jos WIENEN presented the preliminary draft report on voting rights at local level, which focuses on the international standards with regard to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and non-citizens, the major challenges to the implementation of such rights and the diversity of approaches chosen by Council of Europe member states in this respect.

In a context of increasing mass migration in the Council of Europe member states, for political, humanitarian and socio-economic reasons, more and more people have settled or been re-settled in countries and regions other than their countries and regions of origin. Voting encourages migrants and displaced persons to participate actively in the life of their community and may therefore be seen as a natural starting point for successful long-term integration.

This report will be submitted to the Congress Monitoring Committee in June 2018 and to the 34th Congress Session for adoption in November 2018.

On 16 March 2018, the Chair of the Congress Monitoring Committee, Leendert VERBEEK (SOC, Netherlands), also took part in the 114th Plenary Session of the Venice Commission and presented an overview of Congress activities concerning the monitoring of local and regional democracy and the observation of local elections.

The Parliamentary Assembly, the Venice Commission and the Congress jointly organised a parliamentary seminar on the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes which took place on 10-11 April in Tirana in Albania (see III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY°

D. THE NORTH-SOUTH CENTRE

The Congress pursued its participation in the quadrilogue governance of the North-South Centre and its commitment to contribute to the Centre’s activities.

Xavier CADORET (France, SOC), Vice-President and Deputy Spokesperson of the Congress on the South-Mediterranean Partnership, took part in the 18th meeting of the Executive Committee of the North-South Centre in Strasbourg on 8 February 2018. The meeting mainly focused on electing the Centre’s new Chair (Permanent Representative of Spain, Ambassador Javier Gil Catalina), Vice-Chair (Morocco) and Bureau members (Greece, Malta, Morocco, Portugal, Serbia).

Further synergies were built with a meeting between Secretary General of the Congress and Director of the Centre António GAMITO, in Strasbourg on 19 March 2018, as well as with a presentation of the Congress activities in the Southern Mediterranean and in the field of gender equality to the Pool of Experts of the North-South Centre on Women’s Rights in the Southern Mediterranean, during their meeting in Strasbourg on 4 April 2018.

VI. EXTERNAL COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS



A. THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Co-operation between the Congress and the Committee of the Regions of the European Union is ongoing between the Plenary Sessions of the two institutions.

On 16 January 2018, the Congress and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) held their annual High-Level Group meeting in Brussels. The Congress was represented by its President Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM (Austria, SOC) and by President of the Chamber of Regions Gunn Marit HELGESEN (Norway, EPP/CCE). The Committee of the Regions' delegation included its President Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ (Belgium), the First Vice-President Markku MARKKULA (Finland) and Barbara DUDEN (Germany), Chair of the Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX).

The Secretary Generals of the two institutions presented information about the implementation of the decisions taken at last High Level Group meeting. The participants took stock of their current co-operation and discussed common priorities for 2018. They examined in particular the recurring difficulties in implementing the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and co-operation in the fields of migration, human rights and fight against corruption, which were chosen as priority areas for common action.

The Group agreed to present to their respective Bureaux a revised co-operation agreement between the two institutions aimed at creating additional synergies and avoiding duplication, and decided to explore the possibility of organising a joint event in 2019 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of both institutions.

On 21 February 2018, the Congress President addressed the 9th Plenary Session of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) in Giza (Egypt), on the subject of women's empowerment and participation. The Assembly provided an opportunity to build synergies between ARLEM's activities and the Congress' South-Med Partnership programme (see IV.THEMATIC ACTIVITIES)

On 8 March 2018, Congress Rapporteur on Local and Regional Democracy in Ukraine Marc COOLS (Belgium, ILDG) contributed to the 4th meeting of the European Committee of the Regions' Task Force on Ukraine, in Brussels. He recalled the Congress commitment towards further reform of the state administration and local self-government in Ukraine and stressed the importance of political dialogue with the Ukrainian national authorities in the framework of the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. He also presented the Congress' activities in the field and the results achieved in the framework of the project "Promoting Local Democracy in Ukraine".

On 16 March 2018, Emin YERITSYAN (Armenia, EPP/CCE), Head of the Armenian Delegation to the Congress and member of the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), intervened in the Seminar on Public Administration Reform at Local and Regional Level, organised by the EU European External Action Service in Yerevan, Armenia. He stressed that the Congress actions under the country-specific Council of Europe Action Plans aim to implement the provisions of the post-monitoring roadmaps signed with national governments and recalled the tools developed for mayors and local authorities to support ethical and citizen-oriented governance.

On 27 March 2018, the European Committee of the Regions' President Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ held an exchange of views with the Congress members during the 34th Plenary Session of the Congress.

On this occasion, the revised Co-operation Agreement between the Congress and the CoR was signed by the Presidents of both institutions. The agreement, which had been approved by the Bureau of the Congress on 2 February 2018 and by the Bureau of the European Committee of the Regions on 21 March 2018, lays down the basis for consolidating the work carried out jointly by the Congress and the CoR and formalises co-operation procedures directly involving the leadership of the two institutions.

In his speech, President LAMBERTZ stressed that the two institutions work together to drive forward decentralisation and to build citizens' confidence in territorial governance. They have built practical synergies in the field through co-operation programmes, across the Eastern Partnership in general and in the neighbouring regions such as the South Mediterranean. New challenges arise and the two institutions identified priority areas for co-operation: integration of migrants, fight against radicalisation, strengthening good local governance and combatting corruption, and improving human rights.

Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM welcomed the initiative of Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ to organise to organise in February 2019, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the two institutions, an exchange with the Presidents of the major European Associations to join forces to strengthen the European political dialogue, representing and defending the regional interest on the continent and to implement concrete operational activities.

The Congress President also invited the European Committee of the Regions to use its role and position to put the "multi-level governance" on the agenda of the EU institutions as they discuss convergence and cohesion in Europe, with a view of taking the citizens along on the way to develop a common Europe.

VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS



The Congress' co-operation activities support member States in implementing the recommendations adopted by the Congress to address the problems identified during the monitoring and post-monitoring of the Charter and the observation of local and regional elections.

These activities are carried out by the Congress secretariat within the framework of the action plans of the Council of Europe, in close co-operation and synergy with the other entities within the Organisation.

Since October 2012, more than 1000 local authorities (mayors, councillors and young local leaders) benefited from the Congress activities in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Those activities amount to more than 5 000 000 EUR, funded by voluntary contributions from member States and the European Union.

The activities implemented are diverse and adapted to the needs of the beneficiaries: workshops, regional seminars, platforms for exchanges and networking, direct support, political mediation, and legal advice. Thanks to an approach based on peer exchanges, Congress members and beneficiaries on the ground are enabled to debate on principles and standards of local democracy, and to share innovative practices of governance. Such peer exchanges are the Congress added-value; and as of today, more than 50 Congress members representing 23 member States have taken part in peer exchanges, in addition to the members from the respective national delegations of in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

The Congress does not promote a “one-size fit all” local self-government model. Its activities are designed to inspire mayors and councillors to further commit for change in their municipalities, so as to strengthen transparency and citizen participation in their decision-making. In addition, the Congress supports them to commonly defend their interests’ vis-à-vis the national authorities, in close coordination with their associations.

The Congress secretariat is developing proposals for new bilateral projects in Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, as well as projects on cross-cutting themes of interest for local authorities.

The prevention of corruption will be a central theme of future political and operational activities. It will be based on a set of handbooks on “Transparency and citizen participation” for local authorities in Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, as well as on the revised European Code of conduct for the political integrity of local and regional elected representatives and on the guide against the misuse of administrative resources, currently being prepared. The right of local authorities to be consulted will also be a core feature of new projects, with regards to the new guidelines to be adopted by the Congress in 2018. In addition, the Congress will introduce a stronger gender perspective in

future projects, as well as a focus on human rights at local level, including the rights of minority groups and the fight against radicalisation.

A. ARMENIA

The Congress continued implementing its project “Institutional support to the Communities Association of Armenia (CAA)”, funded by the Government of Switzerland, which aims to enhance the capacities of the CAA and enable it to become an active stakeholder in the governance system of the country. This project was extended beyond its original deadline of 1 May 2017 until 31 December 2018, based on the overall progress achieved and the positive mid-term review.

In the current phase, the Congress supported the statutory bodies of the Association and its secretariat in ensuring greater transparency in its management and decision-making processes, in particular by introducing Financial and Human Resources (HR) management manuals, which lay the ground for the introduction of new internal policies and procedures. The draft Financial Sustainability Strategy, which defines potential funding sources and includes recommendations for improving financial flows into the budget of the CAA, will be discussed during the next meeting of the Republican Council of the Association.

The CAA established six thematic committees to enable its members to participate in, and make a greater contribution to, the work of the Association. This approach creates conditions for sharing of responsibilities and delegation of powers between different decision-making bodies, and allows the CAA members to better defend the interests of local authorities’ vis-à-vis central government. The meetings of the thematic committees are taking place as of February 2018.

The CAA reinforced its partnerships, as reflected in the joint organization with relevant ministries and international partners of the conference “Women and local governance” on 7 March 2018 in Yerevan. The CAA Gender, Social and Healthcare Issues Committee addressed the National Government with a statement to strengthen women’s political participation and representation in the local governance system of Armenia. This is proof that the CAA is increasingly recognised as a key actor in the development of local democracy in Armenia by the central authorities, its institutional partners, and the general public.

B. UKRAINE

The project “Promoting local democracy in Ukraine” aimed to improve the implementation of democratic principles in Ukraine by enhancing the institutional and leadership capacities of local elected representatives (mayors and local councillors). Finalised in December 2017, the project provided over 150 mayors and 200 local councillors, as well as 150 young local leaders, with an opportunity to acquire new skills and competences in applying principles and standards of local democracy to make their governance more open, inclusive, transparent and accountable to citizens. Furthermore, a strategic dialogue to support the process of reform was established through peer exchanges, with the contribution of high level representatives of the Congress, including the President.

The “Leaders for change” programme supported mayors and local councillors in adopting innovative and participatory approaches, in response to citizens’ demands and needs. This of workshops and peer exchanges promoted the principles of the Charter and good governance amongst local leaders. They were then enabled to develop new knowledge, capacities and approaches, as well as to improve their common understanding and strengthen their commitment to the reformed legal and institutional framework of local self-government. In addition, the Congress supported 5 municipalities in Ukraine in implementing local initiatives on transparency and citizen participation, a unique “learning-by-doing” approach.

Moreover, commonly agreed thematic roundtables were organised with the delegation of Ukraine to the Congress and with national associations of local and regional authorities. Those roundtables touched upon topical issues raised by the current process of reform, in particular the governance of metropolitan areas and the reform of the status of local councillors.

Such exchanges between key stakeholders of local democracy in Ukraine led to the creation of an informal yet active network, among which participants can share advice and good practice. In this respect, the report of the external evaluation of the project “Promoting local democracy in Ukraine”, conducted in January and February 2018, concluded that the Congress is uniquely placed to provide

support on the application of the principles of the Charter and to develop understanding and application of local democracy principles.

The Congress secretariat has developed a proposal for a new project, based on the needs and feedback expressed by beneficiaries throughout the Congress activities in Ukraine from 2014 to 2017. The official launch of this project is currently pending. In the meantime, the Congress organised a workshop “Gender equality at local level: challenges and opportunities in Ukraine”, in Kyiv on 21-22 February 2018. This event promoted gender mainstreaming in the work of local authorities, and more particularly the role of national associations of local authorities in supporting their members in this respect.

C. EUROPEAN UNION AND COUNCIL OF EUROPE PARTNERSHIP FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE (PGG)

For Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus (2015-2017)

From 2015 to 2017, and within the thematic programme V.2 on “Strengthening institutional frameworks for local governance”, the Congress worked towards the establishment of a transparent, reliable and efficient local self-government, in line with the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.² The Congress activities supported the on-going process of local government reform in the region and placed ethics and transparency at the forefront of its work with local elected representatives as leaders for change.

Peer exchanges at country-specific and regional levels enabled over eighty local elected representatives from all six beneficiary countries to identify and apply effective tools and methodologies to enhance local governance, tackle corruption risks, enhance transparency and develop citizen-oriented policies. As an example, the regional conference held in Tbilisi, Georgia, on 6-7 December 2017, brought together around 100 local authorities and their associations to promote and strengthen ethics, transparency and participatory democracy at local level through the exchange of best practices.

Moreover, the Community of Practice on Local Democracy, a network of experts and practitioners in the field of local governance and ethics, representatives of national associations of local authorities, and civil society, met regularly since January 2016 to discuss ways to improve the quality of local democracy, particularly in the context of each country’s administrative and territorial reforms. As a result, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed in June 2017 between the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG), the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM) and the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC), under the auspices of the Congress.³ The three associations will enhance their co-operation for further good local governance, sharing of experience and good practices between member municipalities, and promoting a culture of dialogue.

In addition, 12 municipalities from Armenia, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (three per country) implemented local initiatives on ethical governance and transparency from March to September 2017.⁴ Provided with financial support, expert guidance and peer reviews, these local initiatives resulted in the establishment of local policies and mechanisms for transparent local governance and increased citizen engagement.

Following the positive results achieved within those local initiatives, local and regional authorities and their associations reflected on the need to develop practical tools to ensure sustainability and a higher impact of local policies. In this regard, the Congress produced two key tools for local and regional authorities:

² In partnership with the Directorate General of Democracy and its Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform.

³ The Memorandum of Understanding signed by NALAG, CALM, AUC and the Secretary General of the Congress is available in English (<https://rm.coe.int/168074c39b>), Georgian (<http://rm.coe.int/168074c394>), Romanian (<http://rm.coe.int/168074c395>) and Ukrainian (<http://rm.coe.int/168074c396>).

⁴ Factsheet of the Local Initiatives on Ethical Governance and Transparency, available at <https://rm.coe.int/local-initiatives-on-ethical-governance-and-transparency/168074c39a>

- The *Handbooks on Transparency and Citizen Participation* in Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine outline the country-specific legislative frameworks and provide practical guidance for preventing corruption risks and implementing transparency and citizen participation mechanisms.⁵ They also provide examples of case law and best practices.
- The *Tool Guide on Management of Change* provides step-by-step guidance for local and regional authorities to lead in a more informed manner, developing policies adapted to the demand and needs of their communities.⁶ It supports the assessment of change and the measurement of the effectiveness and responsiveness of local policies.

In addition, it is worth mentioning the study *Institutionalised citizen participation: assessment of existing mechanisms in Georgia*, which aims to improve the consistency and coherence of legislative frameworks, to highlight challenges for the improvement of citizen participation, and to provide recommendations for amendments of the Code of Local Self-Government.⁷ In essence, the proposals aimed at improving the practical implementation of citizens' rights to accessible and more service-oriented administration through the institutionalisation of public participation mechanisms.

Overall, by contributing to the institutionalisation of knowledge and mechanisms in the region, this thematic programme raised the involvement and expectations of the public in the overall governance process. Benefiting from peer-to-peer approaches and accompanied by practical tools, most of the local public administrations involved in the programme were incentivised to duplicate and generate more efficient, accountable and transparent policy-making in their own municipalities.

D. SOUTH MED PARTNERSHIP

The Congress's co-operation projects in Morocco and Tunisia "Strengthening democratic governance at local and regional level" which were mainly financed by Norway ended on 31 December 2017.

In Morocco, the activities implemented allowed to established excellent contacts with stakeholders at governmental and parliamentary level, but also within the national associations of local and regional authorities and with civil society. Moroccan authorities as well as representatives of associations of local authorities have expressed their willingness to shortly join the status of Partner for local Democracy of the Congress. Morocco would thus become the first country to benefit from this status.

In Tunisia, most of the Congress's contribution focused on providing legislative assistance to establish the legal framework for decentralisation (Code of local authorities, the adoption of which is expected mid-April, and its decrees of implementation). Strong working relationships have also been established with local partners: Ministry of Local Affairs and the Environment; Instance of prospective and support to the process of decentralisation; Assembly of People's Representatives; National Federation of Tunisian Towns, Decentralisation Training and Support Centre (CFAD).

The two-month extension of the remaining two budgets allowed for the establishment of the requirements specification relating to the creation of the site of the Moroccan Association of Chairs of Municipal Councils (AMPCC), which will be developed in a future project. **In Tunisia, the Congress** pursued the preparation of the training module on conflict prevention at local level. This module is being developed in partnership with the Tunisian Decentralisation Training and Support Centre to prevent tensions which could occur within municipal councils after the elections of 6 May 2018.

Two projects proposals were submitted for activities in Morocco and Tunisia in the framework of the Partnership documents 2018-2021 which were adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 21 March 2018.

⁵ Each of the *Handbooks on Transparency and Citizen Participation* in Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine is available online in English and in the respective national language at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/-/handbooks-on-transparency-and-citizen-participation>

⁶ The publication *Management of Change: A Tool Guide for Local and Regional Authorities* is available online in five languages (English, Armenian, Georgian, Romanian and Ukrainian) at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/-/management-of-change-a-tool-guide-for-local-and-regional-authorities>

⁷ *Institutionalised citizen participation: assessment of existing mechanisms in Georgia*, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe, November 2017, available in English (<https://rm.coe.int/1680784817>) and Georgian (<https://rm.coe.int/1680784818>).

In Morocco, the activities proposed will build upon the results and contacts established with the Moroccan authorities during the first phase of the project in order to accompany the country in the implementation of its reform on advanced regionalisation, according to the following lines: Legislative assistance for drafting the decrees of implementation of the law on advanced regionalisation and support to the implementation of the reform; reinforcement of the capacities of the two associations of local and regional authorities (Moroccan Association of Chairs of Municipal Councils and Association of Moroccan Regions) and reinforcement of capacities of local and regional representatives and their administration.

The Congress hopes that Morocco will confirm its willingness – which was expressed on several occasions in 2017 – to join the status of Partner for local democracy and will present an official demand in that sense.

In Tunisia, the project will pursue its 2017 actions to support the implementation of decentralisation by working in particular on the completion of the legal framework of the decentralisation, on the reinforcement of the capacities of the National Federation of Tunisian Towns (FNVT) so that it becomes a privileged interlocutor of the central authorities and on the reinforcement of the knowledge and capacities of local elected and of participative democracy.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: 34th SESSION (27-28 MARS 2018): AGENDA, SUMMARY OF REPORTS, LIST OF RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Agenda:

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680770757&format=native>

II. Summary of reports:

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016807959a8&format=native>

III. List of Resolutions and Recommendations adopted

RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED:

- RESOLUTION 425 (2018) / 27 March 2018
Verification of new members' credentials - Bureau of the Congress - Co-rapporteurs: Michail ANGELOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CCE), Eunice CAMPBELL-CLARK (United Kingdom, SOC)
- RESOLUTION 426 (2018) / 27 March 2018
Revision of Rules 9, 64 and 95 of the Congress Rules and Procedures - Bureau of the Congress – Co-rapporteurs: Xavier CADORET (France, SOC), Marc COOLS (Belgium, ILDG)
- RESOLUTION 427 (2018) / 27 March 2018
Promoting Human Rights at local and regional level - Monitoring Committee - Rapporteur: Harald BERGMANN (Netherlands, ILDG)
- RESOLUTION 428 (2018) / 28 March 2018
Unaccompanied refugee children: the role and responsibilities of local and regional authorities
Rapporteur: Nawel RAFIK-ELMRINI (France, SOC)

RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED:

- RECOMMENDATION 411 (2018) / 27 March 2018
Fact-finding mission on the situation of local elected representatives in the Republic of Moldova - Monitoring committee - Rapporteurs: Marc COOLS (Belgium, ILDG), Gunn Marit HELGESEN (Norway, EPP/CCE)
- RECOMMENDATION 412 (2018) / 27 March 2018
Local and regional democracy in Latvia - Monitoring Committee - rapporteurs: Xavier CADORET (France, SOC), Marc COOLS (Belgium, ILDG)
- RECOMMENDATION 413 (2018) / 28 March 2018
Observation of municipal elections in “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (15 October 2017) - Monitoring Committee - Rapporteur: Karim VAN OVERMEIRE (Belgium, NR)
- RECOMMENDATION 414 (2018) / 28 March 2018
Unaccompanied refugee children: the role and responsibilities of local and regional authorities - rapporteur: Nawel RAFIK-ELMRINI (France, SOC)
- RECOMMENDATION 415 (2018) / 28 March 2018
Local democracy in Andorra - Monitoring committee - Rapporteurs: Gaye DOGANOGLU (Turkey, EPP/CCE) and Zdenek BROZ (Czech Republic, ECR)
- RECOMMENDATION 416 (2018) / 28 March 2018
Local democracy in Liechtenstein - Monitoring committee - rapporteurs: Artur TORRES PEREIRA (Portugal, EPP/CCE), Marie KAUFMANN (Czech Republic, ILDG)
- RECOMMENDATION 417 (2018) / 28 March 2018
Local democracy in Monaco - Monitoring committee - rapporteurs: Michalis ANGELOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CCE) and Marianne HOLLINGER (Switzerland, ILDG)

- RECOMMENDATION 418 (2018) / 28 March 2018
Local democracy in San Marino - Monitoring committee - rapporteurs: Gunnar Axel AXELSSON (Iceland, SOC) and Harald BERGMANN (Netherlands, ILDG)

APPENDIX 2: COMMUNICATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONGRESS GUDRUN MOSLER- TÖRNSTRÖM – 27 March 2018



Dear colleagues,

As I open this session, I believe we are all entering a very serious period in the life of our organisation and, as a result, that of our Congress.

If we failed to see how new, and in many respects completely unprecedented, the situation is compared to what we have experienced in the past, this would condemn us to accepting our fate in the future rather than taking charge of it now. The true merit of politics, which comes in for so much criticism these days, lies in looking forward, planning ahead and taking action to change the course of events.

That is why I should like to use these few minutes allotted to me as President to try and describe, as clearly as possible, the situation we are in, to analyse the repercussions for our institution and to outline approaches which will enable us to find appropriate solutions to the problems.

Each time he opened one of our sessions, my predecessor, Jean-Claude FRÉCON, warned of

the dangers building up in Europe. None of the threats which he described has been dispelled. On the contrary, if we consider the electoral dimension of the crisis alone, we can see from election to election the continuing upsurge in what is called populism. The overall picture of our democracies seems to be becoming gradually gloomier and gloomier. Today, however, I am not going to talk to you again about the general crisis affecting our societies. I am going to talk about a particular consequence of the crisis which affects us directly and has a significant impact on our own operation. That crisis is primarily budgetary in nature, and I will come back to that. However, apart from the budgetary and financial dimension, the crisis also has a political dimension which seriously affects our institutional role, our ability to act and indeed what we stand for.

Let us look, for a moment, at the budgetary crisis. It is older than it would seem: it started when the governments of our member states decided to apply the death knell of “zero nominal growth” to the Council of Europe’s budget. The effect of that decision has been to cut our budget every year by a sum corresponding exactly to the inflation rate in our countries. The application of a policy of that kind over several budgetary cycles has drastic consequences and, as Thorbjørn JAGLAND has so aptly said, erodes the organisation’s capacity to fulfil its mandate.

At the end of last year when the 2018 budget had already been approved, this policy of the member states was compounded by Turkey’s decision to go back to being an ordinary contributor to the Council of Europe’s budget only two years after asking to become a major contributor. This decision came in a context that had already been made difficult by Russia’s failure to pay two thirds of its contributions in 2017.

Let us all be very clear: this budgetary situation - which is difficult to say the least - has political causes and political consequences: the member states no longer recognise the Council of Europe’s political role in the way they should. And some are even calling into question its political standard-settings and monitoring activities. Against a background of this kind, the budget has become an influencing variable used to persuade us to lower our standards. That is why I am referring more to a political crisis than a financial one. And it is that political crisis which we must respond to.

As members of the Congress we must, however, understand that the structure of the Congress budget probably makes us more vulnerable to the crisis than any other institution in the Council of Europe. Each one of us represents institutions and authorities which, on their own, cannot contribute in any way to funding our presence and our activities in the Congress. That is the way things are and it is not being called into question by anyone.

The situation is different for our parliamentary friends who meet in this same chamber. But do so at the expense of their national parliaments, which provide the relevant funding. Our local authorities and regions do not have that direct relationship with the Council of Europe which would require them to fund our participation in the Congress.

This different relationship has a practical consequence: most of our operating budget goes on reimbursements, in other words, our ability to meet here in this chamber today. If in future, in keeping with what we have been doing on a trial basis at the start of this year, we have to go on making cuts in our budgets, we will be bound to reduce our reimbursements (for monitoring, elections observations and all meetings) and hence also the actual operation of our Congress. This would mean, if we do not react, fewer committee meetings, fewer sessions and sittings of the Chambers and fewer monitoring missions. That effectively means less Congress, less influence of the local and regional dimension in the organisation's work and, very quickly, marginalisation of a kind that will be detrimental to our political role and detrimental, throughout Europe, to local and regional self-government which is one of the vital components of our democracies.

And that will come about all the quicker since the modest target share which we have called for in the organisation's budget, namely 3% of the general budget, not only has not been achieved but is actually moving further away every year. We are now at 2.66% of the budget approved for 2018. In an organisation that is intergovernmental by definition, it is not easy to make the voice of local and regional authorities heard.

Yet that is the target which we must set ourselves. The target is, of course, a budgetary one, with the figure of 3%, but it is, above all, a political one. Political, because for more than 60 years within this institution, our mission has been to bring forward the proper balance of powers between central government and local and regional authorities which is such a vital asset for our democracies and our societies.

Dear colleagues, I don't think anyone is going to come and look at us compassionately and offer us ready-made solutions. That is the tough law of politics. It is up to us to re-examine the way we operate, our structures and our rules so that we are able ourselves to cope with the difficulties which are appearing on the horizon and which will, perhaps, compound those affecting us already.

The budget which was approved in December 2017 for the Congress has been cut by almost 10%, as regards both our operation and our Secretariat's payroll, where several posts have been frozen. That is why we have had to take drastic precautionary measures such as shortening our session, postponing several conferences, scaling back our monitoring programme and reducing the number of election observation exercises. If other cuts had to be made, as our operations currently stand, we would have to take steps that would have an even more painful impact on how our assembly operates. That is why our motto must be to change and not to be changed.

Given the seriousness of the situation, the Bureau has therefore set up a steering group consisting of the three presidents, the four political group presidents and the Secretary General and the Director to look into options for far-reaching reform of the way we operate so as to make our budget more sustainable. All possible avenues for reform will be looked into without any taboos, with the sole objective of restoring the means needed for the Congress's independence and safeguarding its ability to act. This strategic steering group will report to the Bureau which, as executive body, will decide on the extent and shape of the reform to be proposed to us because, in the final analysis, it is you who will have to decide in plenary.

I intend to work hard so that we can submit a set of proposals to you at our next session in November. After the adoption, I hope, of a draft reform of our Congress, we will then have to go to the Committee of Ministers, which alone can approve a change in our statutes. This is a cumbersome procedure but there will be extensive debate, firstly, in the Congress, in the Bureau and at the plenary session and then in the Committee of Ministers, which I will address in a few weeks' time to explain our approach.

What is most important as we navigate these stormy waters is for us to be able jointly, openly and transparently to analyse our difficulties and agree appropriate solutions together. The worst outcome for us would be having decisions imposed on us de facto which failed to preserve our key responsibilities, in particular our monitoring and election observation activities. I can assure you that I will work as hard as possible with my colleagues on the Bureau to complete this process, which will demand political imagination and, still more, courage from us.

We will take decisions which will probably be difficult and will demonstrate our political maturity in so doing. As an intergovernmental organisation, the Council of Europe is lucky, and I am not afraid to

use the word, to have an assembly representing local and regional authorities in its midst. That sends out a strong signal of our approach to good democratic governance, which is not possible without those authorities. We must rise to the challenges facing us and, through our determination and our willingness to reform, preserve the voice of local and regional authorities, without which our citizens' daily lives would be more difficult and the standard of our democracy would be seriously undermined.

Thank you.

APPENDIX 3: COMMUNICATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES ANDERS KNAPE – 28 March 2018



Dear colleagues,

It is my honour to welcome you to the 34th Session of our Chamber.

We have some important work to get through this morning, so I will be brief. But let me begin by the debates for which our invited speakers are here. And we have several such topical issues on our agenda of today:

First, we will be examining two reports on election observations, one in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and the other in Georgia.

Then we will have a debate on “Mayors under Pressure”, and I will give you some further information on this theme in a minute.

This afternoon there is a big debate on local democracy in smaller states – with reports on the monitoring that has been carried out in Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino – with the participation of several ministers. These reports would normally be dealt with by our Chamber. But we cannot do everything and, as today we are meeting in Room 1, it is natural to give visiting VIPs

the floor in the Hemicycle. The point I am making is that the work we are doing today is just a small part of the work of this Chamber.

So today we have narrowed down our agenda to two subjects – one of them is “Mayors under Pressure”.

It is not by chance that we have chosen this topic. We are getting more and more reports and complaints by mayors and city councillors who complain of receiving threats and intimidation. Some of them live in fear and are seeking protection. Others have even felt obliged to leave the country.

There is the stick and there is the carrot. We don't get many complaints from people informing us that they have been offered bribes – but we know it happens – and often in the same situations. We are addressing this in the work we are preparing in our Action Plan against corruption, which will be on the agenda of our next session. In the framework of this action plan, we have already adopted a resolution on the Misuse of Administrative Resources during Electoral Processes, and we are preparing a practical guide to prevent such malpractice.

One form of misuse that we come across time and time again is when candidates in elections receive financial and other incentives or threats to resign or to change party, usually to join the ruling party.

We know that in many of our countries, local politics are closely tied to national politics. The main political parties are vying for power and no ruling party wants to see large towns and cities fall into the hands of the opposition.

For some of us this is all part of the game of politics, but in some of our countries, the idea of pluralist democracy itself is looking increasingly vulnerable.

So, going back to our subject ‘Mayors under Pressure’: when we decided on this debate, we agreed to focus today on politically motivated pressure.

We are aware that local politicians are subject to many forms of pressure. Many of us receive death threats from crazy people and we have seen some horrible cases where these threats have been followed through. Some of our best politicians have been murdered because of the hatred that they had the courage to stand up to, defending causes that extremists had warned them not to defend.

It is a fine line, in my opinion, between this intimidation that we all sometimes have to face from a few crazy people and the intimidation that some of our colleagues have to face from the party that is in

power. But today we have chosen to focus on the latter. So when we talk of 'pressure', we are referring to undue political pressure that can usually be traced to the party in power, the ruling party.

It is not enough to complain and raise awareness about such pressures – it is better if we do something about it. This is why we have invited Patrick KLUGMAN to join us today, because at the very same time that we decided to organise this debate, the City of Paris announced its plan to set up an International Observatory to support and to protect such mayors. We are delighted that he has agreed to tell us more about this proposal, which I hope that we will be able to contribute to.

We have also invited some local politicians to speak to us at first-hand about their experience in this respect. I can tell you that to take the floor on such an issue takes a lot of courage and I am looking forward to hearing their stories.

This takes us back to elections. 'What is the reason for this political pressure?' 'What did I do wrong?' 'What did I do to deserve this?' – These are the questions the victims are asking themselves – and asking us. The answer is very simple – you stood up and you stood for election – and you were elected. That is your crime. You had the courage to stand up for what you believe. Today, I believe, we are going to hear some people who have shown courage and who are being persecuted for their courage.

So when we talk about elections – the real issue we have to face is: was this election free and fair? Did people have a fair chance to stand, to campaign, to present their case? Obviously, if people are afraid to stand for election, if they have fled the country or been arrested for their political beliefs, then the answers to these questions will be 'no'.

So, the election observation work that members of our Congress are doing is vital. I am proud of the election observation work carried out by the Council of Europe and the Congress, drawing on international electoral standards. It concerns, in particular, transversal issues, including the accuracy of voter lists, the voting rights at local level of specific groups of voters, such as internally displaced persons, or migrants and the already mentioned Misuse of Administrative Resources during Electoral Processes.

I think that it is a shame we cannot do more election observations and this is also a consequence of the current financial crisis that this Organisation is going through. We cannot accept all the invitations that we receive to observe elections – because our budget – which is continuing to decrease in real terms – will not allow it.

I believe that in such a crisis situation we have to be strong and continue to defend the principles that we believe in. And this is not only a problem of the Congress – our Organisation as a whole is being challenged.

Yesterday in the hemicycle we heard the Congress President explain to us the gravity of this situation, the huge cuts that have been made to our budget and the cuts in staff, all of which are causing us to tighten our belts and to reduce our activities. These cuts are unprecedented in my long experience of this Organisation. We are all feeling the pressure.

Do we continue to stand up for our principles of democracy, human rights and rule of law, or do we bow to this pressure?

As our President announced, the Congress Bureau has set up a Steering Group to look at the options and make some proposals for reforming the Congress to ensure that these cuts do not weaken our capacity to defend local and regional democracy in Europe. I am participating in this group and I will do all I can to ensure that the work of this Chamber is not compromised.

We are under pressure as never before. Let us stand firm. Let me encourage you to play a full part in our debates today, which I hope will help to answer some of these questions.

I wish you all a stimulating and fruitful session. Thank you.

APPENDIX 4: COMMUNICATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF REGIONS GUNN MARIT HELGESEN – 28 March 2018



Dear colleagues,

This Session is taking place at a sombre moment for our continent.

In the European Union and in non-EU countries, there is an on-going debate and uncertainty about the future of the European project – a debate which is unfolding in the context of transformations in the European political landscape, marked by the rise of populism and by challenges to the democratic values on which this continent is built; in the context of tensions and conflicts both within and between our countries that scar our common European space; in the context of new dividing lines being formed, with their potential for fragmentation of this continent.

Many of these issues have direct relevance and implications for the regional dimension of Europe and our Chamber must address them in its work. Some of these issues are on the agenda of our Session today.

However, it is also a sombre moment for this Organisation and for our Congress. We all heard yesterday the communication of the Congress President, which I fully support. It is my strong conviction that if we are to remain relevant, if we are to bring about tangible impact in pursuing our mission, change is a must. We must reform and adapt this Congress and this Chamber to respond to the reality of the situation.

With this conviction, I am participating in the Strategic Group on the Congress Reform, as President of the Chamber of Regions. I can assure you that I will devote all my energy and insight to this work, to produce relevant and practical proposals for the reform that we will be debating during our next Session in November.

We, members of the Chamber of Regions, much as our colleagues in the Chamber of Local Authorities, must engage in reflection on the future of the Congress – its structure, the scope of its activities, its operational mode. In this regard, and to start the debate, I would like to offer today three avenues of reflection that, in my opinion, should be guiding our discussions.

First, we need to look at the very structure of our Chamber. As you all know, our Chamber has members that do not sit with full capacity – those with the asterisk after their name, as we say, meaning those without the right to vote. Yet, the ability to participate in decision making through voting is an essential function of elected representatives and our Chamber as a whole. We should ask ourselves whether this inequality of members in a “two-speed” Chamber – with members who vote and those who do not – is a politically tolerable situation, and what purpose it serves.

In the reform which we are launching, we must envisage regional members with equal rights, first and foremost the right to vote. This will not be easy, because not all our member States can be represented by regions that go beyond the notion of “functional”, that are truly regional entities in the sense of our understanding of regions with directly elected political bodies. We currently have around 17 countries not having such regions. How can their territorial interest be represented in our Chamber in full capacity? This is the first line of thought I ask you to reflect upon.

Second, and a very much related question we should ask ourselves, is whether the principle of numerical parity of members of the two Chambers serves any practical purpose. Every country, indeed, has local authorities; however, as I have just said, not every country has regions. Yet today, both Chambers of the Congress have the same number of members.

Should this artificial numerical parity be maintained? Or should we be more flexible in the composition of national delegations, allowing our countries a choice of deciding on more representatives for the

local level – or, in other cases, more representatives for the regional level? In my opinion, this could only strengthen the political relevance of our Chamber, and should be the second line of thought to pursue.

Thirdly, let us reflect on the proportion of the types of regional authorities represented in our Chamber. In self-governing regions, the regional authorities consist in equal part of the legislative and the executive branches; in other cases, regional government means mostly the executive branch. Yet our Chamber has a large number of regional councillors and very few representatives of the executive.

I ask myself whether our reform should include measures to enhance the executive dimension of the Chamber of Regions, for a balanced representation, in order to reflect the reality in our member States.

Dear colleagues,

These are just some avenues of reflection in the reform process that we have embarked upon, and to which I call on you to contribute your thoughts and experience from your national frameworks. We must engage together in this process in order to set the record straight, as it is important for this Chamber to contribute as fully as possible to the Congress reform. As our President said yesterday, we must be at full liberty to discuss all possible aspects, with no taboos attached.

Our Chamber represents the voice of the regions within our Congress – regions that are crucial actors in the economic dynamism of our member States. The role of regions in national economic development has been long recognised; it is this recognition indeed that led to the creation of the Chamber of Regions within the predecessor of this Congress more than 40 years ago.

Our Chamber has a major role to play in the European political dialogue, in representing and defending regional interest across our continent – and it has an important role, together with the Chamber of Local Authorities, in the debate on the future of this Congress.

I am convinced that in this future Congress, the Chamber of Regions – our Chamber – will always have the place it so rightly deserves.

I invite you all to participate and to bring forward your ideas and your insights to the Strategic Group. I would be very happy to bring your contribution to the Group! Your energy and your input are crucial for the success of this reform.

Thank you.

APPENDIX 5: COOPERATION AGREEMENT WITH THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

On the occasion of the 34th Congress session, on 27 March 2018, Congress President Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM and President of the European Committee of the Regions Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ signed a revised Co-operation Agreement to replace the existing Agreement of 2009.

Revised Co-operation Agreement: <https://rm.coe.int/20180327-cooperationagreement-revised-co-operation-agreemnt-between-th/168079b433>

Speech by the President of the Congress: <https://rm.coe.int/20182703-speechgmt-cor-en/1680796e1c>

Speech by the President of the European Committee of the Regions:

As part of its monitoring of local and regional democracy in Europe, the Congress maintains a regular dialogue with member states of the Council of Europe. The Committee of Ministers, which includes the 47 Foreign Ministers of these states, the Conference of Ministers responsible for local and regional authorities, as well as its Steering Committees – like the one on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) – are partners in this regard.

Several times a year, the President and the Secretary General of the Congress provide the representatives of the 47 member states in the Committee of Ministers with a record of its activities and hold an exchange of views.



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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an institution of the Council of Europe, responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its 47 member states. Composed of two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions – and three committees, it brings together 648 elected officials representing more than 200 000 local and regional authorities.

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