

## STATUTORY FORUM

### Congress budget for 2024-2025

Recommendation 495(2023)<sup>1</sup>

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

1. Reaffirming its institutional role as the voice of the local and regional authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe and guardian of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which has been ratified by all member States, as well as its responsibility to promote and foster the implementation of the Council of Europe's common standards at local and regional level;
2. Welcoming the results of the 4th Council of Europe Summit in Reykjavik and the joint declaration by the Heads of State and Government to recommit themselves to protecting the democratic foundations of our societies, in particular through the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities;
3. Welcoming the decisive support given by the Heads of State and Government in their Reykjavik Declaration to the essential role of multi-level governance in achieving the Organisation's vision;
4. Welcoming the adoption of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy and the commitment made by the Heads of State and Government to guarantee and strengthen democracy and good governance at all levels throughout Europe;
5. Noting the firm commitment of the Heads of State and Government to the European Convention on Human Rights' system as the cornerstone of the Council of Europe's protection of human rights and welcoming in this respect their consideration of the essential role played by local and regional authorities in the promotion and protection of human rights;
6. Calling for local and regional authorities to be proactively involved in devising preventive and curative public policies to manage climate and environmental crises, since all major crises will ultimately have an impact on all levels of governance; supporting work to promote the role of local and regional authorities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Congress' areas of competence;
7. Underlining the recognition, by the Heads of State and Government, that local authorities are among those responsible for implementing the Convention and ensuring compliance with the Court's judgments; welcoming their call on the Congress to strengthen political dialogue with their respective national interlocutors on the implementation of the judgments;
8. Referring to the call by the Heads of State and Government to intensify efforts, at all levels of governance, for the effective protection of the rights of Ukrainian children, in response to the consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine;
9. Supporting ongoing efforts to involve young people in decision making by helping local authorities to improve their policy and practice in working with young people; calling for future funding for the "Rejuvenating Politics" initiative, which gives 46 young people the opportunity to participate actively in the work of the Congress sessions and committees each year;

<sup>[1]</sup> Adopted by the Statutory Forum on 6 July 2023 via online voting, co-rapporteurs: Konstantinos KOUKAS, Greece (L, EPP/CCE) and Lia MONTALTI, Italy (R, SOC/G/PD).

10. Underlining the need to review Congress activities in the light of the decisions of the 4th Summit and new developments in priority areas such as human rights and the rule of law, while strengthening statutory and cooperation activities and raising the profile of the Congress and its relations with its institutional partners;

11. Referring to the regular exchanges of views between the President and the Secretary General of the Congress and the Committee of Ministers, and welcoming the support and satisfaction expressed by the member States and the Committee of Ministers regarding the results achieved and the reforms undertaken by the Congress;

12. Referring to the successive budget cuts that the Congress has experienced over the years and to the risks that further budget cuts could pose to its statutory, post-monitoring, thematic and cooperation activities, which have been tailored to the expectations and interests of the member States;

13. Highlighting, in addition, that the Congress has been obliged to discontinue certain activities, in particular those enabling it to respond to the challenges identified in the Secretary General's annual reports on the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and to the priorities of successive Chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers;

14. Referring to the successive reforms it carried out in 2010, 2015, 2018 and 2019 and its desire to contribute to the Organisation's overall effort;

15. Stressing that, since 2010, the Congress has continued to contribute to the Organisation's efficiency gains and that it has undergone budgetary restrictions, both in operational and staff terms, with the number of posts falling from 47 to 34 at present;<sup>2</sup>

16. Considering in this context that the breaking point between the resources available to the Congress Secretariat and the capacity to deliver the expected results has been reached;

17. Welcoming and fully supporting the proposals by the Secretary General of the Congress to increase the resources allocated to the Congress under the Council of Europe's ordinary budget for 2024-2025, in order to provide the Secretariat with human and financial resources commensurate with the institution's mandate and the development of its activities, particularly in the light of the strategic decisions of the 4th Summit;

18. Calls on the Committee of Ministers:

a. to confirm the confidence shown at the 4th Summit in local and regional authorities to promote and protect the values of the Council of Europe as close as possible to its citizens;

b. to reinvest in the Congress, for the first time in 13 years, to enable it to implement the Reykjavik deliverables by strengthening its statutory activities and launching a human rights strategy in synergy with, in particular, the rights defenders, the Court and the Department for the Execution of Judgments;

c. to encourage member States to make voluntary contributions for specific operational activities and to make staff available to the Congress Secretariat;

d. to take account of the inflation adjustment for the next biennium in order to maintain the Council of Europe as a competent actor in the fields of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, so as to enable all its bodies and structures to act in the interest of the citizens of the 46 member States; and

e. to invite the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to grant the Congress, in the draft programme and budget for the 2024-2025 biennium, an increased budgetary allocation fully commensurate with its contribution to the priorities of the Council of Europe as a monitoring body and pan-European body for the promotion of territorial democracy, encouraging decentralisation as well as debates and exchanges of good practice between local and regional elected representatives on the main topical issues of our societies.

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 1.

## Appendix 1 – Evolution of human resources within the Congress Secretariat

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Posts	47	46	44	42	42	41	39	39	38	38	38	34	34	34

## Appendix 2 – Proposed increase in the Congress staff and operational budgets for 2024-2025

### 1. Congress programmatic objectives for the 2024-2027 Programme and Budget and key deliverables

The programmatic focus and key deliverables proposed for the 2024-2027 programme are reflected in the Congress **recommendation to the 4th Summit** to recognise the crucial role of local and regional democracy in instilling democratic values, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and in involving citizens in democratic governance and decision making at local level. The Congress recommendation is based on the conclusions of the HLRG report on the results expected from the 4th Summit.

Over the next 4 years, the Congress aims to strengthen and develop its priority activities.

With its mandate strengthened by the strategic decisions of the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government in May 2023, the Congress, as one of the political assemblies of the Council of Europe, will continue to affirm and promote the essential role of local and regional authorities in consolidating and promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law, in accordance with the priorities of the Council of Europe and the Secretary General's four-year strategic framework.

The priority of the Congress will be to continue to develop its effective institutional functioning through its statutory bodies (sessions, bureaux, committees, etc.), to strengthen the statutory activities of monitoring the European Charter of Local Self-Government and observing local and regional elections, and to continue to develop cooperation activities in priority areas, particularly for Ukraine.

New developments will concern the human rights/rule of law sector, with this theme being strengthened within the Congress, in cooperation with the relevant bodies within the Council of Europe and beyond.

The Congress, recognised as a pioneer on youth issues, notably through its "Rejuvenating Politics" initiative (youth delegates), will continue its commitment in this area.

Deepening the Congress' relations with its institutional partners, in particular the EU, the OSCE, the OECD and the UN for the integration of the SDGs in the local and regional dimension, is also a priority.

These priorities must be accompanied by a necessary increase in the visibility of the Congress, in particular by strengthening its communication, within the general framework of the Council of Europe's communication strategy.

In each of its fields of action, the Congress will focus on achieving tangible and convincing results, contributing to the fulfilment of its mission.

**Statutory meetings:** (sessions, bureaux and committees): given the constraint of only two sessions per year, and in order to increase the political responsiveness of the Congress (thematic debates / adoption of texts), to make more systematic use of statutory forums.

**Monitoring:** in response to the growing need to monitor the state of local and regional democracy, to ensure that each country is monitored every 5 years and to obtain ratification of the additional protocol to the Charter by all member States, as well as the lifting of reservations to the Charter wherever possible; to continue to produce the periodic report on the recurring issues raised by the Charter.

**Election observation:** convince States to institutionalise the principle of systematically inviting the Congress to observe local and regional elections; increase the number of election observations and have the capacity to carry out two simultaneous observation missions; develop dialogue as part of post-election monitoring.

**Human rights / rule of law:** As part of the statutory activities, develop a strategy for strengthening human rights and the rule of law at local and regional level; increase awareness of human rights among local elected representatives and their administrations and step-up dialogue on the subject with local authorities and relevant associations; strengthen co-operation with the Court, the Commissioner for Human Rights and the Venice Commission, as well as with the Human Rights Directorate General for the effective implementation of the Register of Damage for Ukraine and the execution of the Court's judgments.

**Youth:** Intensify the involvement of youth delegates in statutory and cooperation activities, particularly in the field (election observation); make more systematic use of the youth delegate alumni network.

**Relations with external institutional partners:** strengthen political synergy and develop strong links with strategic partners, in particular with the EU, the OSCE, the OECD and the UN, thus helping to raise the Council of Europe's visibility.

**Visibility:** to make effective use of the Congress' work by participating in communication initiatives launched by the Organisation, by increasing its presence in social media and by disseminating Congress messages more widely via networks of elected representatives and young people.

## 2. The need to strengthen human resources and the operational budget

The reinforcement of Congress activities needs to be accompanied by an adjustment of the Secretariat's means of action, in particular a clear reinforcement of human resources. Such a reinforcement is essential, as the Congress finds itself at the breaking point between the means available and the capacity to deliver qualitative results. Since 2012, the number of budgeted posts has fallen by almost a quarter (-23%, from 44 to 34 posts at present), having a considerable impact on existing activities and making it impossible for the Congress to respond to new challenges.

It is therefore becoming urgent to restore a balance in the resources of the Congress, with the following reinforcements envisaged, in line with the main deliverables and results expected for 2024-2027:

- Creation of a unit dedicated to **Human Rights / Rule of Law**, with the creation of an A1 administrator post and a B2 support post. This is becoming a strategic priority for the Congress, with a vast field of action in the pipeline, including, among other things, setting up the register of damage for Ukraine.
- Significant reinforcement of resources for statutory **monitoring and election observation activities**: creation of two A1 administrator posts and one B2 support post for Charter monitoring and creation of an A1 administrator post (Observation Officer). With these reinforcements, it will be possible to increase the number of monitoring visits and election observation missions in order to ensure an adequate level of coverage (in terms of number, quality and level of representation), to have a standardised monitoring rhythm of 5 years per country, and to be able to carry out two simultaneous observations. In this way, the early warning mechanism provided by the monitoring and election observation activities will be strengthened, in cooperation with the member States. This will also enhance the quality and effectiveness of Congress recommendations in response to the current challenges and expectations of member States regarding the state of local and regional democracy in Europe.
- Strengthening the Congress **Communication Unit**: creation of a B2 support post. This will make it possible to achieve the objective of increasing the visibility and impact of Congress activities through strong, high-quality and effective communication.
- The potential and dynamism of the activity linked to the **youth delegates**, which is destined for major development, requires a stable dedicated resource, with the creation of a B5 post of Youth Policy Officer for the Congress Youth Delegates (currently, there is no structural post dedicated to this activity).
- In addition, the Congress will endeavour to use internal transfers to strengthen its activities according to priorities, particularly for **cooperation** activities.

In total, for the period 2024-2027, the Congress is therefore requesting the creation of 8 additional posts (3 B2; 1 B5; 4 A1), in order to support the strengthening of its statutory activities and strategic developments in its fields of action. This implies an increase in the annual budget allocation of €633,000, including pension costs, for staff expenditure.

The development and strengthening of the Congress' activities also require that the operational budget be reinforced. The Congress is requesting an increase in the annual budget of €158,000 to cover the increase in the number of monitoring visits and election observation missions, the development of human rights and cooperation activities and the enhancement of the Congress' visibility.

The table below summarises the proposed increase in the Congress' staff and operational budgets for 2024-2025:

Immediate Outcome	Approved Budget 2023			Proposed Increase		Proposed Budget		
	Staff cost	Operational cost	Budget 2023	Staff cost	Operational cost	2024	2025	Reinforcements
Sessions/committees	1 531,7	1 502,2	3 033,9	80	11	3 125	3 125	New job creations: 1 B5 for Youth delegates
Charter monitoring	146,3	463,0	609,3	250	24	884	884	New job creations: 2 A1; 1 B2 - reinforcement of the Monitoring commission
Election observation	309,7	273,6	583,3	99	55	737	737	New job creations: 1 A1 - reinforcement of the number of election observations
Co-operation	664,6	113,9	778,5		10	789	789	
Human rights, Rule of Law				151	31	182	182	New job creations: 1 A1; 1 B2 - new strategic track
General Management Expenditure	1 153,8	230,9	1 384,7	52	27	1 464	1 464	1 B2 - to reinforce communication
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>3 806,1</b>	<b>2 583,6</b>	<b>6 390</b>	<b>633</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>7 180</b>	<b>7 180</b>	