

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE (CDDG) Plenary, 29 November 2021,
Strasbourg, France

Statement by Leendert Verbeek, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Check against delivery - Seul le prononcé fait foi

Thank for the invitation.

It is a particular pleasure to address you today at this CDDG plenary.

Last time at the previous CDDG plenary in April the Secretary General of the Congress Andreas Kiefer had an exchange of views with you. It is important to have a regular dialogue at different levels and to have cooperation at the level of the respective secretariats.

Congress fully endorses the Committee of Ministers' approach of complementarity between the Congress' priorities and the reflection of the CM priorities in the work of the CDDG.

The current Congress priorities (for 2021-2026) put an emphasis on environmental and social sustainability, digital revolution, as well as citizen engagement in a democracy and effective responses to crises. They will be implemented by the work programmes of the three committees. But we have to be realistic, this approach is limited by the available staff and budget.

Our bureau will discuss the budgetary situation on 6 December and possibly decide which changes must be made in the organisation and programmes of the committees. This in order to have a decent workload of our secretariat and to have a responsible control of the available budget.

Our Congress is particularly interested in:

- the future CDDG work to prepare a report on new forms of deliberative and participatory democracy; On 19 November 2021 the Congress Governance Committee approved the report on the use of deliberative methods in European municipalities and regions. The next Congress session in March 2022 (22-24/03) is expected to adopt this report, its resolution and recommendation. This report contains illustrative examples of municipalities and regions that have been using deliberative

processes. It provides practical guidance to municipalities and regions interested in using deliberative processes.

Our Congress is also interested in:

- the drafting of a recommendation on principles of good democratic governance and of a recommendation on multilevel governance. Our Congress adopted a series of thematic reports, resolutions and recommendations on transparency, conflicts of interest, protection of whistle-blowers, nepotism, public procurement and abuse of administrative resources in election campaigns.

All these are contained in a handy manner in a series of brochures aimed at giving guidance to local and regional politicians and to the administrations under their authority.

In addition, the Congress has been consistently promoting multilevel governance. It pointed to the need of a more effective multilevel governance during the current crisis, in the light of the Charter.

We in the Congress are happy about the statement of the 2020 Athens declaration by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, who clearly linked the intergovernmental dimension in the Council of Europe with multi-level governance within member states: at national, regional and local level.

Equally of interest for the Congress is the CDDG focus on:

- green public administration (report with good practices and guidance at local, regional and national level, deadline end 2023);
- our Congress prepares a report on human rights and environment;
- digital technologies and a handbook with case studies, best practices and policy recommendations, deadline 31/12/2024);
- our Congress adopted a report on homesharing platforms and prepares a report on smart cities and regions

Our Congress is also interested in:

- democratic governance and COVID 19 pandemics . This concerns a report on multilevel governance and response to emergencies;
- a report on delivering social services at local level, deadline 31/12/2025);

Our Congress adopted the report on Ensuring the respect of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in major crisis situations, for which I was a rapporteur.

The current health crisis has shown it and the post recovery period will show even more clearly the need for an effective multilevel governance.

In its reply to this Congress Recommendation the Committee of Ministers praised the Congress Covid 19 hub for sharing good practices and pointed to the importance of complying with the Charter and its protocol in times of crisis.

The CM supported the call of the Congress to prevent risks of centralisation in the long term and to ensure enhanced citizens' participation in local affairs.

You have also put on the agenda:

- new technologies in the electoral process (consultation to take stock in the implementation of CM/Rec (2017)5 on electronic voting and of the Guidelines on new technologies in the electoral process, deadline 31/12/2025).

Congress adopted a report on local and regional elections in major crisis situations, which covers the issues of new voting technologies

Naturally our Congress is also interested in following the CDDG consultations on transfrontier cooperation. These are essential dimensions for the activities of the Congress

We should build on the foundation of our consolidated cooperation.

I am happy that the Congress contributed to your activities as CDDG and its Working groups. In particular the Congress contributed to the elaboration of the Recommendation on the democratic accountability of elected representatives and elected bodies at local and regional level.

The Congress also has a strong record of work on promoting public ethics and anti-corruption at the regional and local levels and has reinforced its own ethical standards for the Congress members. This doing so by adopting a Code of Conduct and a declaration of interests, signatures of which are required for participation in Congress activities.

Also our Congress actively contributed to the activities of the CDDG Working Group on Democracy and Technology (GT-DT). In particular in the elaboration of the Study on the impact of digital transformation on democracy and good governance.

These good examples of cooperation and synergy will inspire us to enhance future complementarity and join our forces for more democracy and better governance for all Europeans.

The current challenges in Europe can only be addressed by a combination of multilateralism and multilevel governance. And for sure with active involvement of and with local authorities being closest to the citizens and enjoying their trust and by respecting the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

The Congress has been conducting its monitoring of the application of the Charter as well as the election observation and fact-finding missions, despite all odds and limitations, linked with the current crisis.

The Congress has conducted ten remote monitoring missions, adopting already seven reports (Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, Netherlands, Albania, Cyprus, North Macedonia and Spain). Three more reports are in preparation (UK, Luxembourg and Germany).

There has been a mission to Ukraine and there will be a mission to Turkey to update the respective country monitoring reports.

The Congress conducted this year election observation missions to Morocco (remote and onsite combined), Georgia (onsite), Denmark (onsite).

One more mission is planned to Armenia (remote).

There is a possibility extra money will be made available for doing extra monitoring missions next year. We are studying this possibility at the moment and will adjust our monitoring programme within the possibilities of the available capacity of our secretariat.

The Congress is an indispensable platform of dialogue and exchange of knowhow for the whole Council of Europe and I invite you to make best use of this pool of know-how from the local and regional level.

I am pleased to confirm that the chairperson of the Governance Committee, Ms. Jelena Drenjanin, is looking forward to discuss with you in one of the meetings in 2022.

Thank you again for your invitation and I think we have a good basis to further pursue our cooperation.