

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



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The budget and resources of the Congress in 2014-2015

Bureau of the Congress

Rapporteurs: Jean-Claude Frécon, France (L, SOC)¹
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Summary

Since 2008 the Congress has held regular debates on its budgetary resources, its development prospects, the resources needed and the choices to be made to achieve the objectives identified by the priorities.

The Congress has consistently supported the efforts to reform the Council of Europe proposed by the Secretary General, Thorbjørn Jagland, and has carried out its own reform of structures and working methods.

As regards the operational budget, from 2010 onwards the Congress has borne the burden of such measures in a way which is comparable to other Council of Europe entities but, as far as the staff budget is concerned, the Congress has contributed more, in proportion to its size, to the cuts. As a consequence the Congress staff / operational ratio has decreased significantly over the last years (from 60/40 in 2012 to 56/44 in 2013).

The Congress stresses that, while the existing financial resources cover its basic activities, they do not allow it to realise its full potential. It commits itself to looking for extra budgetary resources with a view to becoming an operational actor on the ground, in addition to its consultative and statutory work.

The Congress budget for 2014 and 2015 should allow it to implement the Congress' priorities for 2013-2016; which are fully in line with the Council of Europe's priorities as proposed by Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland in his speech to the Parliamentary Assembly on 23 January 2013, and with the priorities and work programmes of the chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers.

¹ L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group
ILDG: Independent Liberal and Democratic Group
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
NR: Not registered



RECOMMENDATION 335(2013)²

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

1. Considering:

a. the decisions it has taken in 2010, in the framework of the reform of the Council of Europe, to refocus its priorities and activities on the core values of the Organisation, and the subsequent changes to its structures and working methods;

b. the resulting amendments to the Congress Charter and Statutory Resolution, approved by the Committee of Ministers on 19 January 2011.

2. Stressing that, whereas its operational budget has been readjusted from 2010 onwards in a way which is comparable to other sections of the Organisation, the Congress has been affected, as regards staff resources, to an extent which is disproportional to its size.

3. Underlying that, in these difficult circumstances, the Congress has been able to implement a streamlined and politically ambitious programme of activities, and to build up a new operational capacity, both features being at the heart of the new priorities adopted in October 2012 for the 2013-2016 period.

4. Recalling that the Congress has kept the Committee of Ministers regularly informed about its priorities and activities, in particular by means of regular exchanges of views with the President and Secretary General of the Congress.

5. Welcoming the fact that the priorities³ adopted by the Congress in October 2012 for the 2013-2016 period are fully in line with the priorities proposed by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for the whole Organisation, in his speech to the Parliamentary Assembly on 23 January 2013.

6. Reaffirming that, in order to successfully carry out its revitalised statutory mission and implement its new priorities, the Congress needs to be able to count on a sustainable basis for action, which includes an appropriate level of resources.

7. Consequently asks the Committee of Ministers to:

a. acknowledge the efforts made, and results achieved in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Congress in recent years;

b. adopt a 2014-2015 budget of the Congress based upon at least a zero real growth principle as compared to the budget for the biennium 2012-2013;

c. encourage member states to consider funding, by means of voluntary contributions and/or seconded officials, targeted co-operation activities based on the monitoring by the Congress of the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and on the observation of local and regional elections, as well as on shared Congress / Council of Europe priorities;

² Debated and adopted by the Congress on 19 March 2013, 1st sitting (see document CG(24)5PROV explanatory memorandum), rapporteurs: Jean-Claude Frécon, France (L, SOC) and Svetlana Orlova, Russian Federation (R, EPP/CCE)

³ Priorities of the Congress 2013-2016 [CG(23)5]

d. ensure, through its dialogue with the Congress, consistency between the priorities adopted by the Congress and its budgetary allocations in order to achieve critical mass and impact;

e. note the reaffirmed determination of the Congress to play its part in ensuring the successful reform of the Council of Europe, as the voice of local and regional authorities within the Organisation and the promoter of local autonomy and regional democracy in Europe and its neighbourhood;

f. continue to involve the Congress fully in the discussions concerning the future of the Organisation and grant it its rightful place in the institutional framework.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM⁴

1. Since 2008, the Congress has been holding regular debates on its budgetary resources, its development prospects, the resources needed and the choices to be made to achieve the objectives identified in its priorities.

I. THE CONGRESS BUDGETARY POLICY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF ITS REFORM

2. In the past years, the Congress has enhanced, through a thorough review of its structures and working methods, the effectiveness of its action and its relevance and focus on the Council of Europe's core values.

3. The Committee of Ministers has been fully involved in this Congress reform process through its regular exchanges of views with the President and Secretary General of the Congress as well as through the decisions taken on the follow-up of Congress Recommendation 290 (2010) and Recommendation 299 (2011).

4. Whereas the global Congress biannual budget is allocated by the Committee of Ministers, allocation from the budget envelope to individual planned expenditure items in each financial year is the responsibility of the Congress Secretary General, who is providing the provision of expenditure necessary to the functioning of the Congress' statutory organs and two Chambers. Resources are also devoted to activities determined by its priorities, or by current events.

5. In the framework of its reform, the Congress has reallocated financial resources to statutory activities, the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ECLSG) and the observation of local and regional elections. The political dialogue with other Council of Europe partners, such as the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Human Rights Commissioner, has also been reinforced.

6. Funds have been earmarked to ensure the work of the Committees and the development of the activities linked to the European Local Democracy Week.

7. The ordinary budget, though reduced over the last years in real terms, allows the Congress to perform its specific role by implementing its statutory activities. However, the Congress has the potential to do far more, should the necessary financial resources be made available.

8. In a difficult budgetary context, the Congress is committed to finding new financial resources in order to achieve its ambition to become an operational actor. As is the case in the intergovernmental sector of the Council of Europe, extra budgetary resources could be usefully employed to implement activities, to build upon and to develop the work of the Congress in the fields of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

9. To achieve the highest impact this should be carried out in the framework of action plans set up by the Organisation as a whole for some of its member states, to which the Congress could contribute through its specific experience from local and regional political representatives. The

⁴ Adopted by the Bureau of the Congress on 11 February 2013.

Congress commits itself to a transversal approach in these operational activities which would complement its statutory and consultative tasks.

10. The Congress intends to cooperate with member states in implementing the recommendations of its monitoring activities and its election observation reports, by identifying projects aiming to raise democratic standards at local and regional level in Europe.

11. In particular, the Congress is ready to help local and regional elected officials, both in Europe and in countries covered by the Council of Europe neighbourhood policy, to develop solid and productive relationships with their citizens and national governments, as well as do thematic work in areas such as public ethics, intercultural dialogue, integration of Roma and awareness raising about the Urban Charter and human rights at local and regional level.

II. THE 2012-2013 PROGRAMME AND BUDGET

12. In October 2010, at its 19th Session, in the framework of its reform, the Congress approved changes to its structures and working methods and amendments to the Congress' Charter, which were approved by the Committee of Ministers on 19 January 2011.⁵

13. In implementing this reform, the Congress made additional efforts for priority activities, through the reallocation of available resources. This was achieved in particular through a significant reduction in the financial support to Congress' external partners.

14. Among these priority activities, particular efforts were focused on monitoring the ECLSG and observing local and regional elections. The funds allocated for monitoring the Charter rose from 245,000 € in 2011 to 265,000 € in 2012. Likewise the funds allocated to election observation rose from 170,000 € in 2011 to 200,000 € in 2012. 2012 also saw a further expansion of European Local Democracy Week activities.

15. At the end of 2012 the budget implementation of the Congress should result in a budget utilisation of about 99,29%, the highest one recorded in recent years.

16. The 2012-2013 budget takes account of the considerable reduction of the staff budget requested by the Secretary General, which was made by the suppression of an A2/3, a B5, a B4 and a B3 posts. These cuts come in addition to the suppression of an A5 post and a B5 position in 2011, a considerable reduction in the allocation for temporary staff for the Sessions and the non-renewal of the secondment of a national official in the framework of the European Local Democracy Week.

17. Continuing the effort to prioritise its role as a monitoring mechanism of the ECLSG, by making its monitoring activities more regular, systematic and open to political dialogue, the Congress carried out monitoring in 9 countries in 2012. Priority has also been given to election observation missions, the scope of which has been widened to systematically include pre-electoral missions, to ensure a proper understanding of the context and process of elections.

18. Monitoring and election observation reports are used as road-maps for cooperation and assistance activities to enhance local and regional democracy in Council of Europe member states, aiming at better impact of its recommendations and better comparability of its findings and identifying common challenges and threats for local and regional authorities, as well as identifying innovative solutions in order to propose responses to the problems encountered.

⁵ Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2011)2

19. Another priority field for the Congress' work in 2013 is promoting human rights at local level. The Congress is developing its activities to make local and regional authorities aware of their responsibilities for the implementation of human rights, in particular by promoting good practices and mechanisms of mediation. It is also preparing a pan-European programme aimed at promoting ethics and preventing corruption at local and regional level.

20. Following the Summit of Mayors in September 2011, the Congress, in cooperation with the SRSG on Roma Issues, has developed the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion aiming at ensuring human rights for the Roma community and recognising the crucial role of the local and regional authorities in the process of Roma inclusion. In 2012 a task force was set up within the Congress Secretariat and, after a comprehensive consultation process, the Alliance entered into its operational phase (2 pilot activities were organised in Budapest and Madrid in December). The official launching of the Alliance will take place on 20 March 2013 during the plenary session of the Congress.

21. Efforts are continuing to streamline the Congress' activities in accordance with the core Council of Europe values and priorities, as presented by the Secretary General in his speech to PACE on 23 January 2013.

III. 2014-2015 BUDGETARY PERSPECTIVES

22. In the context of the Council of Europe's new biennial programme and budget, and in accordance with its priorities 2013-2016 adopted in October 2012, the Congress will pursue the following main objectives:

- a) Raising the quality of local and regional democracy, in particular through monitoring of local and regional democracy, observing local elections and fostering citizen participation through awareness raising actions such as the European Local Democracy Week and promoting human rights at local and regional level.
- b) Helping local authorities to rise to the new challenges resulting from the economic and financial crisis, in particular through promoting good governance, fostering social inclusion for marginalised populations such as the Roma, and strengthening elected representatives' commitment to ethical conduct and combating corruption at local and regional level.
- c) Developing its operational capacity, in particular through targeted cooperation activities in close partnership with relevant Council of Europe bodies and in the context of the programmes and action plans of the Organisation as a whole in some of its Member States, and contributing to the development of local and regional democracy in countries of the Southern Mediterranean.

23. The Congress stresses that these priorities are fully in line with the Council of Europe priorities proposed by Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland in his speech to the Parliamentary Assembly on 23 January 2013. More specifically, the Congress project on corruption, transparency and ethics, in partnership with GRECO and the Centre of Expertise, which is to be presented on 21 March 2013 at the Congress session, fully corresponds to the first priority indicated by the Secretary General: the fight against corruption and other forms of misuse of power. The European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion falls within the scope of the closely intertwined second and third priorities of the Secretary General, i.e. the fight against intolerance and hate speech and the protection of minorities. Finally, the monitoring by the Congress of the European Charter of Local Self-Government as well as the targeted cooperation projects based upon the ensuing recommendations aim at achieving, in the field of local and regional democracy, the fourth priority set by the Secretary General: the consolidation of the Council of Europe legal space.

24. The Congress stresses that, while the existing financial resources still cover its basic mandatory activities, they do not allow it to realize its full potential. It commits itself to looking for extra budgetary resources, which could open the way to implement operational activities in addition to its consultative and statutory work.

25. Such extra budgetary resources would be used to implement post-monitoring activities, to build upon and develop the Congress' work in its priority fields. This would enable the Congress to achieve the critical mass needed for it to more effectively perform its role within the Organisation and beyond, and to expand its activities in the area of local and regional democracy, in particular by implementing assistance programmes following monitoring reports on the European Charter of Local Self-Government and reports on observation of local and regional elections, by contributing to the Council of Europe neighbourhood policy and by giving the required operational capacity to the Alliance for Roma inclusion.

26. The Congress will continue to pursue constant improvement of its structures, priorities and working methods. It is also willing to play a full part and support the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in the reform of the Organisation, believing that these processes can bring the Council of Europe and its organs fresh impetus and a stronger and higher-profile political role.