

PARTNER FOR LOCAL DEMOCRACY STATUS

For local authorities of countries
in the Council of Europe's
neighbourhood



Council of Europe Congress
of Local and Regional Authorities

The Congress



Le Congrès

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

The Congress' Partner for Local Democracy status

Established by Resolution 376 (2014), the Partner for Local Democracy status of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities enables elected representatives of local authorities of countries in the Council of Europe's neighbourhood to participate, within the Congress, in strengthening local and regional democracy. The introduction of democracy at the level closest to the citizen is a fundamental factor for the development and consolidation of genuine pluralist democracy.

The adoption of this status follows on from the new impetus given by the Congress to its relations with the countries in the Council of Europe's neighbourhood, especially those on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, under the Organisation's neighbourhood partnerships. This status must be requested via a procedure established by Article 64 of the Congress's Rules and Procedures.

Members of delegations from countries granted this status may take part in the sessions of the Congress and the meetings of its committees (Monitoring Committee, Current Affairs Committee, Governance Committee) throughout the year and can express their opinions and table proposals in order to contribute to debates.

The Partner for Local Democracy status ties in with the Council of Europe's neighbourhood policy. Designed for partners in North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, **the Neighbourhood Policy** pursues the following three objectives:

- ▶ to facilitate democratic political transition in the countries concerned
- ▶ to help promote good governance through the protection of human rights and the rule of law
- ▶ to reinforce and extend regional action to address common challenges

Granting the status

The decision to grant Partner for Local Democracy status is taken by the Congress, on the basis of a draft resolution submitted by its Bureau in response to an application from the country concerned.

APPLYING FOR THE STATUS

The formal application must be made jointly by the government and at least one association of local/regional elected representatives of the state concerned and be forwarded to the President of the Congress.

The application must contain an explicit reference to the authorities' commitment to respect and promote the values of the Council of Europe at all levels of government. The authorities must also undertake to:

- ▶ promote the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-government and/or the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy in the field of devolution/regionalisation, including the holding of regular free and fair local and regional elections that meet international standards;
- ▶ comply with the principles of the European Code of Conduct for the political integrity of local and regional elected representatives;
- ▶ maintain a regular and transparent dialogue with the Congress on progress made and obstacles encountered.

EXAMINATION OF THE APPLICATION

The Bureau of the Congress examines the application, and may take several of the following elements into consideration:

- ▶ the country's participation in the Council of Europe's neighbourhood policy and its implementation of joint action and/or of a programme of co-operation with the Organisation;
- ▶ ratification of the Council of Europe's open conventions or enlarged partial agreements (in particular the Venice Commission and the North-South Centre);
- ▶ whether it holds Partner for Democracy status with the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly.

The decision of the Bureau is then presented to the next session of the Congress for adoption.



Forming the delegation

The composition of the delegation must comply with the principles set out in the Congress Charter and Rules of Procedure. The delegation must be made up of representatives who hold a local or regional authority mandate, the number of whom is laid down by the Congress on a case-by-case basis.

The delegation must also reflect, as far as possible, an equitable geographical and political representation and have at least one representative of the underrepresented sex.

The delegation elects a Head, who is assisted by one or more secretaries, who must be independent of any government authority or agency for the purposes of this work and, preferably, have links to one of the country's associations of local and regional authorities.

Information on the composition of the delegation must be updated in accordance with the relevant procedures at the latest 15 days before each renewal session of national delegations to the Congress (held every four years).

Travel and subsistence costs arising from the participation of the delegation are not paid for out of the Congress's ordinary budget.

How the status works

The Congress is a forum that brings together a wide variety of elected representatives of the 47 Council of Europe member States with rich and wide-ranging experience, including regional and municipal councillors, mayors and presidents of regions. Often faced with similar issues in the daily management of their communities, they discuss the difficulties they encounter and the practical solutions they have found. This exchange of experience and good practice between peers helps to invigorate local democracy and promote innovative ideas.

REINFORCED POLITICAL DIALOGUE WITH EUROPEAN ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

Partner for Local Democracy status enables members of the delegations of beneficiary countries to engage in dialogue with their European counterparts during Congress proceedings (sessions, committees and, where appropriate, meetings of political groups). This regular dialogue helps strengthen relations between the countries on both shores of the Mediterranean, capitalising on the Congress's experience. This is also an opportunity for members to join a network of local and regional elected representatives committed to promoting democratic values.

POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS AND EXCHANGES OF GOOD PRACTICES BETWEEN PEERS

The experience acquired by the Congress, including during the period of democratic transition in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, can, at the request of elected representatives of neighbourhood countries, help the process of consolidating democracy in the countries concerned. Elected representatives from both the northern and southern Mediterranean can share their experience to improve the daily lives of their citizens.

PARTICIPATION IN FRAMING EUROPEAN POLICIES

Through their participation in the sessions of the Congress and its Chambers, and in the meetings of its committees, members from the beneficiary countries work on promoting local democracy not only at domestic but also pan-European level. Members of these delegations can take the floor and put forward proposals, thereby contributing to broader thinking on the views presented in the Congress on major subjects of common interest.

The role of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is to promote local and regional democracy, improve governance and strengthen local and regional authorities' self-government. It is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the principles contained in the European Charter of Local Self-Government. It encourages the devolution and regionalisation processes as well as cross-border co-operation between cities and regions.

The Partner for Local Democracy status was established by Congress Resolution 376(2014). The adoption of this status follows on from the new impetus given by the Congress to its relations with the countries in the Council of Europe's neighbourhood. This status enables members of the delegations from the beneficiary countries to take part in the Congress's work.



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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.

