

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Declaration 7 (2023)¹ The humanitarian situation in Karabakh and neighbouring cities and regions

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) strongly condemns the military operation carried out by Azerbaijan in Karabakh on 19-20 September 2023 and the preceding ten-month-long blockade of the region, which have led to a dire humanitarian situation, significant loss of human lives and the flight of over 100 000 people to neighbouring Armenia.

2. The Congress recognises the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan but expresses its deep concern over the humanitarian consequences of the situation, and welcomes the efforts of the Armenian authorities to receive Karabakh Armenians who have fled the region and to respond to their needs.

3. The Congress supports international efforts to respond to the crisis and welcomes in this regard the deployment of a United Nations mission at the invitation of Azerbaijan, as well as recent visits to the region by the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on Migration and Refugees and by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, and takes note of Resolution RESOL-VII/032 on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh after Azerbaijan’s attack, adopted by the European Committee of the Regions of the European Union on 11 October 2023, and of Resolution 2517 (2023) and Recommendation 2260 (2023) “Humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh” adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 12 October 2023.

4. The Congress, therefore:

a. deplores the serious humanitarian consequences of the situation resulting from Azerbaijan’s military operation and preceding blockade of the region, and calls on the authorities of Azerbaijan to implement the interim measures indicated by the European Court of Human Rights under its Rule 39 in its decision of 22 September 2023 and to refrain from any action that may lead to further deterioration of the situation and further exodus of the population;

b. joins the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Committee of the Regions in calling for the release of all representatives of Karabakh, including at the local level, detained in Azerbaijan;

c. expresses its solidarity with and full support to Armenian local authorities that are at the forefront of the efforts to receive Karabakh Armenians; welcomes the assistance already provided by the national Government of Armenia to local communities and calls to sustain it in the future; and calls on national, regional and local authorities in other European countries to support Armenia in these efforts and provide them with the necessary humanitarian assistance;

d. affirms its readiness to assist Armenian national and local authorities, including through co-operation activities on the ground, in supporting Karabakh Armenians who have fled the region and in addressing the consequences of the situation, in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122), Congress Resolution 411 (2017) and Congress Recommendation 394 (2017) “From reception to integration: the role of local and regional authorities facing migration”; considers in this regard that special care should be taken to ensure the protection of women and girls, giving due consideration to Congress Resolution 487 (2022) and Congress Recommendation 481 (2022) “Reception of women and children refugees in Europe’s cities and regions”;

e. notes the promises made by the authorities of Azerbaijan that the rights and freedoms of Armenian residents will be ensured and the announced plans for their reintegration, and reaffirms the responsibility of Azerbaijan to guarantee the safety of Karabakh Armenians remaining in the region and ensure the protection of their rights, in full respect of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ETS No. 157), and including the right to establish local self-government institutions in conformity with the European Charter of Local Self-Government ratified by Azerbaijan in 2002, and to allow a safe return to the region of those who so wish;

f. calls on the authorities of Azerbaijan to ensure unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to those remaining in the region, including through a full re-opening of the Lachin Corridor;

g. decides to pay special attention to the situation of all persons, regardless of their ethnic origin, displaced as a result of Azerbaijan’s military operation on 19-20 September 2023, and those staying in the region, and to respect of their rights, including those protected by the European Charter of Local Self-Government;

h. shares the belief expressed by the Parliamentary Assembly that this long-standing conflict can only be resolved peacefully, and calls on the authorities of all levels of governance in both Armenia and Azerbaijan to demonstrate goodwill and engage in dialogue, work towards creating a climate of trust, tolerance and mutual respect, and undertake confidence-building measures as the only way to find a solution to the situation;

i. entrusts its Bureau with overseeing the Congress’s follow-up to the present declaration, including a possible visit to the region, and stands ready to assist, using all statutory, co-operation and political tools at its disposal, in concertation with other Council of Europe institutions and the relevant parties.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress during the 45th Session on 26 October 2023 (see document [CG\(2023\)45-21](#)), rapporteur: Bernd VOEHRINGER, Germany (L, EPP/CCE).