

# THE CONGRESS

OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES OF  
THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE



Bringing democracy  
to your doorstep at the heart  
of our cities and our regions

The Congress



Le Congrès

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

# 50 years of championing local democracy

The Conference of Local Authorities, the predecessor of the Congress, held its first session in Strasbourg on 12 January 1957, under the presidency of Jacques Chaban-Delmas (France). Since then, the Congress has become a key player in building genuine grassroots democracy in Europe.

In 1975, with the emergence of a significant regional dimension in the member States, the remit of the Conference of Local Authorities was extended to include regions.

It thus became the Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, bringing together all European territorial communities.

## A founding text

The strengthening of local democracy and the member States' recognition of its increasing role led to the adoption of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1985 (ECLSG).

## A new stage after the Vienna Summit

1994 witnessed a new stage in the advance of local and regional democracy, with the establishment of the present Congress



Jacques Chaban-Delmas (France), first president of the Conference of Local Authorities, 12 January 1957.

of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, which replaced the "Conference".

## Recognition by Heads of State

At the 2005 Warsaw Summit, Council of Europe Heads of State and Government reasserted the importance of local and regional democracy for the democratic health of Europe

and underlined the Congress' major role in carrying out this mission.

## Reinforcement of Instruments

The Reference Framework on Regional Democracy was developed in 2009. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe encourages the governments of member States to take into account this text in connection to their policies and reforms. The Congress pursued its work to promote the ECLSG, which now covers the 47 member States of the Council of Europe.

*"As far as I know, this is the first time in the history of democracies that the representatives of the local authorities have been invited to give their opinion [...], with the approval of the governments, on the possible terms of their participation in the institutions being set up."*

*Excerpt from the speech by Jacques Chaban-Delmas on 12 January 1957*

# Monitoring local democracy

Assessing the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in each member State is at the heart of the Congress' mission.

This monitoring enables constructive political dialogue to be engaged with authorities in member states about local and regional democracy issues. The Congress undertakes regular general country-by-country monitoring exercises; it can also examine a particular aspect

of the Charter. In addition, it can carry out urgent fact-finding missions to look into cases of concern. The reports, recommendations and resolutions that it adopts provide information to governments, parliaments, associations, elected representatives and the media about the

situation of local and regional democracy in specific countries and the application, in particular, of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Numerous legislative reforms have been set in motion by member states on the basis of the findings of these monitoring activities.



*The observation of local and regional elections and the monitoring the European Charter of Local Self-Government are two priorities of the Congress.*

## Observing local and regional elections

The Congress periodically observes local and regional elections, especially in Council of Europe member states.

Observation activities, which cover both polling and election campaigns, allow co-operation to be established at the highest level with representatives of political parties and groups, electoral commissions, the media and NGOs. Congress election observation exercises are conducted in co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Venice Commission, in particular through the Council

for Democratic Elections, but also with other international organisations such as the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. The Committee of

the Regions of the European Union is also invited to participate in observation missions carried out by the Congress.

### Post-monitoring and post-observation

Following the monitoring and the observation of elections, the Congress puts in place a follow-up to ensure the implementation of its recommendations and, to this end, engages a continued dialogue with member states.

# Cooperation and partnerships

The Congress has reinforced co-operation and partnerships with member states and other institutions and European associations in order to consolidate territorial democracy. Activities in the field are proposed to further ensure the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and of the Congress' recommendations.



*The Congress is organising the participation of Albanian representatives in the NEXPO 2013 International Municipal Fair in Croatia.*

**B**ased on its monitoring of local and regional democracy as well as on the observation of elections, the Congress offers its expertise to member States, and through its members, offers a pool of practical and political experiences, in particular:

- Assessment of the legal and institutional national framework
- Contribution to the drafting of new legislation and policies
- Exchange of good practices, peer-to-peer exchanges and interactive seminars
- Sessions on leadership for local and regional elected representatives

According to the specific situation of the countries concerned, as well as needs of local authorities, activities can be organised in the following fields: the role and responsibilities of local elected rep-

resentatives; ethics in politics and decision-making; citizen participation; positive campaigning (with a view to local and regional elections); consultation and dialogue between central and local authorities; promotion and exchange of experiences in the implementation of human rights at local level; the regionalisation process; cross-border co-operation.

## Contribution to action plans

Projects designed by the Congress are part of the democratic component of Council of Europe Action Plans for its member States. The Congress already implements programmes in Albania, Armenia and Ukraine. Projects are under discussion for other member states.

Moreover, the Congress is active in the neighbourhood policy of the Council of Europe, aimed at supporting territorial and legislative reforms in neighbouring countries, such as Morocco and Tunisia.

## A close partnership with the European Union

In 2005, the Congress and the Committee of the Regions signed a cooperation agreement aimed at "advancing local and regional democracy, devolution and self-governance in Europe and (guaranteeing) the respect of established local and regional competences by national and European authorities". This agreement was extended in 2009, formalising the fields and methods of co-operation between the two institutions.

## Networks and hubs

The Congress has also promoted good governance and citizen participation by supporting associations of local authorities in close collaboration with their European networks (AER, CEMR) and encouraging the creation of networks, namely: the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS), the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA), and the European Network of Training Organisations for Local and Regional Authorities (ENTO).

# The pan-European assembly of territorial authorities

The Congress is the body representing local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe's 47 member States.

It is the only European body tasked with monitoring the state of local and regional democracy and the development of local and regional self-government

throughout Europe. As the voice of Europe's municipalities and regions, it works to foster grassroots democracy while encouraging consultation and political

dialogue between national governments and local and regional authorities, through cooperation with the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers.

## The Congress's achievements

Since its establishment, the Congress has contributed to drawing up a range of international treaties, including the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which has become the benchmark international treaty in this area.

After the adoption of the Charter by the member States in 1985, the Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government adopted a Reference Framework

for Regional Democracy in 2009, in Utrecht, (The Netherlands). This text serves as a body of principles which the Congress relies on for monitoring regional democracy. The Congress' long term objective is to develop it into a more binding tool, which would be the regional counterpart of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Other legal instruments in the area of local and regional democracy:

**The European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation** between Territorial Communities or Authorities (1980).

**The Convention on the Participation of Foreigners** in Public Life at Local Level (1992).

**The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages** (1992).

**The European Urban Charter (1992) and the European Urban Charter II** ; Manifesto for a new urbanity (2008).

**The European Charter on the participation of young people** in municipal and regional life (1992) and the revised Charter (2003).

**The European Landscape Convention** (2000).

### The European Charter of Local Self-Government

The European Charter of Local Self-Government lays down common standards for protecting and developing local authorities' rights and freedoms and requires States which have ratified it to comply with a number of conditions, principles and practices in this area. It was opened for signature in 1985 and came into force in 1988.

The Charter has been ratified by 47 member States of the Council of Europe.

In 2009, an additional Protocol on citizen participation was adopted to supplement the text of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Opened for signature on 16 November 2009, and having entered into force on 1 June 2012, this text aims

to bring the right of everyone to participate in the affairs of a local authority within the scope of the Charter. This echoes the preamble to the Charter which recognises that the right of citizens to participate in governance is part of the common democratic principles of all member states of the Council of Europe.

## One Congress and two Chambers for 200,000 communities

The Congress is made up of two chambers: the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions. It has 324 full and 324 substitute members, all appointed for four years, representing over 200,000 local and regional authorities in the Council of Europe's 47 member states.



*648 local and regional elected representatives meeting in a plenary session in Strasbourg (France).*

**N**ational delegations to the Congress comprise representatives of local and regional authorities in the Council of Europe's 47 member states. Members have either been directly elected and hold an electoral mandate in a local or regional authority or are politically answerable to a directly elected assembly. Representatives and Substitutes are grouped into national delegations

and political groups, and divided between the Congress' two chambers, the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions. The Congress elects its President for two years in turn from members of each of the two chambers.

The Congress meets in Strasbourg in two plenary sessions a year, in spring and autumn. During

these sessions, it holds thematic debates, examines draft reports and adopts recommendations and resolutions. It invites representatives of national governments and local and regional authorities as well as delegations from various European organisations, and delegates from non-member States also attend these sessions as observers.

# Three committees to reflect the Congress's priorities

The Congress's work is organised with three committees: a Monitoring Committee, a Governance Committee and a Current Affairs Committee.

The *Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments* by member states of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Monitoring Committee), responsible, in particular, for monitoring the application of the Charter as well as the evolution of regionalisation in Europe, for preparing reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in Europe and for monitoring specific questions related to local and regional democracy in the member states;

The *Governance Committee*, responsible for affairs falling within the scope of the Congress's statutory mandate such as governance, public finance, cross-border and interregional co-operation, e-democracy as well as citizen participation and co-operation with inter-governmental bodies;

The *Current Affairs Committee*, responsible for studying the role of local and regional authorities with regard to the major challenges of our society and preparing work on thematic issues such as social cohesion, education, intercultural dialogue, youth, integration of migrants, protection of children, fight against exclusion from the point of view of the Council of Europe's core values.

The Congress also set up a *Statutory Forum*, composed of the heads of all national delegations and the 17 members of the Bureau, to act on behalf of the Congress between sessions.



*The question of youth participation is among the Congress' priorities.*

## Fair representation

**There must be fair representation in terms of political, geographical and gender balance in each delegation. The Congress Charter sets a minimum representation of 30% of the under-represented sex for each delegation.**

There are four political groups within the Congress:

**EPP/CD:** Group European People's Party in the Congress

**SOC:** Socialist Group

**ILDG:** Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

**ECR:** European Conservatives & Reformists Group

# 50 years of local and regional democracy

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|---|---|--|
| <b>1957:</b> First Conference of Local Authorities  | <b>1995:</b> First monitoring report on local democracy                                     | <b>648</b> elected representatives                                   |
| <b>1985:</b> Adoption of the European Charter of Local Self-Government                                | <b>2005:</b> Co-operation agreement with the Committee of the Regions of the European Union | <b>47</b> national delegations                                       |
| <b>1990:</b> First election observation report  | <b>2009:</b> Renewed agreement with the Committee of the Regions                            | <b>200 000</b> territorial communities                               |
| <b>1993:</b> Establishment of the first Local Democracy Agency  | <b>2010 – 2012:</b> Reform of Congress structures, administrative rules and procedures      | <b>50</b> reports, resolutions and recommendations adopted each year |
| <b>1994:</b> The Standing Conference becomes the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe |   |  |

## LIST OF MEMBER STATES (and number of representatives)

Albania (4)	Estonia (3)	Lithuania (4)	San Marino (2)
Andorra (2)	Finland (5)	Luxembourg (3)	Serbia (7)
Armenia (4)	France (18)	Malta (3)	Slovakia (5)
Austria (6)	Georgia (5)	Republic of Moldova (5)	Slovenia (3)
Azerbaijan (6)	Germany (18)	Monaco (2)	Spain (12)
Belgium (7)	Greece (7)	Montenegro (3)	Sweden (6)
Bosnia and Herzegovina (5)	Hungary (7)	Netherlands (7)	Switzerland (6)
Bulgaria (6)	Iceland (3)	Norway (5)	“The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (3)
Croatia (5)	Ireland (4)	Poland (12)	Turkey (18)
Cyprus (3)	Italy (18)	Portugal (7)	Ukraine (12)
Czech Republic (7)	Latvia (3)	Romania (10)	United Kingdom (18)
Denmark (5)	Liechtenstein (2)	Russian Federation (18)	

## CONTACTS



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