

2009

THE STATE OF THE

CONGRESS



COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Publication 2010

Editing :

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Graphic design:

Spring Design

Photos:

Council of Europe

Cover page: Family pictures of the Congress members – October Session 2009

Printed in Germany

The state of the Congress 2009

Table of contents

Introduction by Ian Micallef 5

Acting President of the Congress

Who's who in the Bureau of the Congress 8

Council of Europe celebrates its 60th anniversary 10

In London, in Madrid and in Strasbourg, the Congress reaffirms its contribution to the Organisation's objectives

Statement by Ulrich Bohner

Utrecht Conference: Congress enters into dialogue with governments 13

Ministers approve the reference framework for regional democracy

Interview with Jean-Claude van Cauwenberghe

Young people at the heart of territorial democracy 16

European Local Democracy Week, a Congress initiative to mobilise all citizens

Congress safeguards the health of local democracy 18

For a more effective monitoring of the 47 Council of Europe member states

Congress mission in the field: election observation 20

Skopje, Yerevan, Baku: Congress elected representatives assess the quality of electoral democracy

Relaunching political dialogue with Minsk 21

Congress initiates a new co-operation process with Belarus authorities

Interview with Miroslav Kobasa

Territorial authorities facing the crisis 23

International financial crisis hits our communities hard and narrows their scope for action

Interview with Maurice Vincent

Climate : Copenhagen disappointment alarms our communities 26

After the Copenhagen Summit, local responses to environmental challenges needed as never before

Interview with Iñigo de la Serna Hernáiz

Intercultural relations in cities, guarantee of social cohesion 29

Congress supports local policies for cultural diversity

Interview with Heinz Buschkowsky

Euro-Mediterranean partnership must involve local communities 32

Congress ready to offer its expertise to engage the Mediterranean in concrete co-operation

Interview with Ian Micallef

Transfrontier co-operation: a topical debate 35

Transcending borders, territorial authorities consolidate cohesion of their communities

Interview with Zlata Plostajner

A network of strategic partnerships for the Congress 38

Congress signs a new agreement with the EU Committee of the Regions

Appendices 40



Ian Micallef

(Malta)

Acting President of the Congress

“The Congress stands firm in pursuing its mission as the main contributor to the Council of Europe action at territorial level”

2009, the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe, was also the year of the 15th anniversary of its Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. Symbolically, 2009 also saw the Congress, armed with its new Charter, moving up a gear to a new dynamic of two full plenary sessions each year, reflecting its growing political role in the European landscape.

This publication, *The State of the Congress 2009*, features the highlights of the Congress' activities over the past year. In a break from the traditional “institutional” presentation, it focuses on the main accomplishments in the domains of excellence of the Congress, its Institutional Committee and its Committees on Culture and Education, Social Cohesion, and Sustainable Development, as well as its Working Groups of Regions with Legislative Power and on Interregional Co-operation.

The State of the Congress 2009 offers an overview of the current situation of the Congress and its mission to advance local and regional democracy across Europe. This situation is characterised by a growing number of requests for Congress intervention and new challenges brought about by global developments – economic crisis, globalisation processes, climate change – against the background of budgetary constraints and a reform process launched in June 2009.

At the beginning of the year, the Congress Bureau, was informed that President Yavuz Mildon was temporarily unable to fulfil his duties. I therefore accepted the responsibility entrusted in me by the Bureau, in my capacity as First Vice-President of the Congress and President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, to act as President ad interim of the Congress. I considered that my main task was to see that the Congress effectively pursued its mission in accordance with the priorities established for 2009-2010.

This meant first of all ensuring the effective monitoring of the situation of local and regional democracy in member states, which remains the core mission of the Congress. To be effective, this monitoring must be regular, and it should not be limited to the production of reports and recommendations. It must also be part of an ongoing political dialogue with the different levels of governance in the country.

The Congress has therefore allocated a larger part of its 2010 budget to monitoring. In 2009, it carried out five monitoring missions; for 2010, 15 missions are scheduled. In addition, to follow up its recommendations and make its action more concrete, the Congress has been looking to implement targeted assistance programmes. This would involve working with the governments and territorial authorities concerned to reinforce local democracy and address situations which are highlighted in the country reports and Congress recommendations.

With its first-time monitoring missions to Iceland, Switzerland and Belgium (in progress) in 2009, the Congress has almost completed the first monitoring cycle of the 44 member states which have, to date, ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Four countries remain to be monitored for the first time in 2010: Austria, France, Montenegro and Serbia, with the monitoring of Belgium to be completed. In addition, the Congress is working to encourage the three remaining member states (Andorra, Monaco and San Marino) to sign and ratify the Charter.

The Congress also continued to observe local and regional elections in member states. In 2009, the Congress observed local elections in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Azerbaijan and the city of Yerevan (Armenia). Members of the EU Committee of the Regions took part in Congress observation missions, in accordance with the co-operation agreement between the two institutions.

This agreement was updated further in 2009. The revised agreement, signed in November, formalises in particular the annual meetings of the Presidents assisted by Secretaries-General, and their role in defining co-operation priorities.

Seeking to inject innovation into its action and working methods, the Congress launched a reform of its activities and structures, with a report by Congress Past-President Halvdan Skard (Norway) discussed by the Congress Standing Committee in Brdo, Slovenia, in June. The general direction of reform is to make sure that Congress resources are not dispersed among too many activities but focused on a core of clearly defined political priorities.

It is our conviction that Congress' action should continue to be based on the two pillars of democracy and human rights and pursued accordingly. This must be reflected in its budgetary situation, which was on the agenda of the Congress Bureau throughout 2009, and was the subject of two Congress recommendations to the Committee of Ministers, adopted in March and in June.

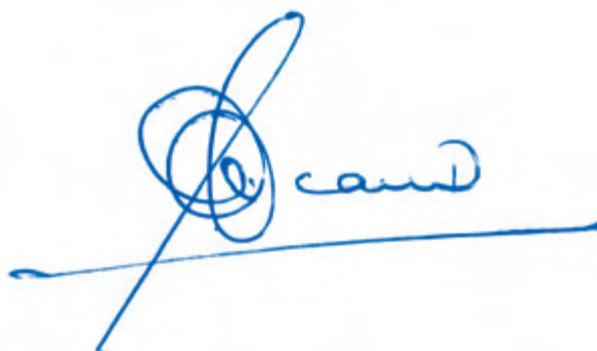
In an effort to advance territorial democracy in neighbouring countries, the Congress reinitiated dialogue with the authorities of Belarus, and prepared a co-operation project on local democracy in that country. In June 2009, the Congress' Standing Committee held a debate on the subject, and preparations are underway to begin the implementation of the co-operation project in 2010.

In the same spirit, the Congress held a debate in March on ways to enlarge Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, both with its European partners and with territorial authorities on the southern rim of the Mediterranean. It decided to create a working group of Euro-Mediterranean cities and provinces, to clarify and target its strategy and activities in the region. The Congress also supported the setting up the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), and will participate in its work as an observer organisation.

Congress delegations took an active part in the 5th World Water Forum, organised by the United Nations in Istanbul in March, and in the UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen in December 2009, presenting contributions of the Congress to both events.

Work was pursued to enhance citizen participation at local and regional level. In 2009, the Congress supported the adoption of the Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on democratic participation at local level. One example of the practical implementation of citizen participation initiatives is the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW), organised every year in October since 2007. A co-founder of ELDW, the Congress fully supported its 2009 edition through co-ordinating and encouraging initiatives within Council of Europe member states. From 2010, the Congress is fully in charge of the organisation of the Week.

In their Declaration on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe, adopted in October, Congress members reaffirmed their conviction that today, the Congress stands firm in pursuing its mission as the main contributor to this Organisation's action in the field of democracy and human rights at territorial level. Our help and advice are being sought by local and regional authorities across Europe and beyond, and we can do much more if our aspirations, which correspond to the expectations of territorial communities, are matched with adequate resources. Through innovation and reform, through targeted action and through renewed partnerships we will achieve this objective.



Ian Micallef
Acting President of the Congress



**PRESIDENT
OF THE
CONGRESS**

Mr Yavuz Mildon
Turkey



**ACTING
PRESIDENT
OF THE
CONGRESS**

Dr Ian Micallef
Malta



**PAST PRESIDENT
OF THE
CONGRESS**

Mr Halvdan Skard
Norway



**PRESIDENT
OF THE CHAMBER**

Mrs Ludmila Sfirloaga
Romania



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Mr Günther Krug
Germany



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Ms Suvi Rihtniemi
Finland



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Mr Istvan Borbely
Hungary



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Mrs Svetlana Orlova
Russian Federation



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Mr Knud Andersen
Denmark



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Mr Ioannis Michas
Greece



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Mrs Nataliya Romanova
Ukraine

**Chamber
of Regions**



**ACTING
SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE CONGRESS**

Mr Wojciech Sawicki



**DIRECTOR
OF THE CONGRESS**

Mrs Antonella Cagnolati



**PRESIDENT
OF THE CHAMBER**

Dr Ian Micallef
Malta



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Mrs Dubravka Suica
Croatia



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Mr Anders Knape
Sweden



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Mr Jean-Claude Frécon
France



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Mrs Hilde Zach
Austria



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Mr Emin Yeritsyan
Armenia



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Mr Fabio Pellegrini
Italy



**VICE -
PRESIDENT**

Mr Onno van Veldhuizen
Netherlands



The European flag was projected on the Palais de l'Europe building to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe, on the occasion of the Swiss chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers – November 2009.

Council of Europe celebrates its 60th anniversary

In London, in Madrid and in Strasbourg, the Congress reaffirms its contribution to the Organisation's objectives

The Statute of the Council of Europe was opened for signature in London in 1949. Sixty years later the Organisation still has the same basic objectives: to protect human rights and strengthen democracy and the rule of law. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has become a key player in this process. Through its monitoring activities in the 47 member states it watches over the implementation of local and regional democracy.

In a declaration adopted in October 2009, the Congress stated that local and regional authorities had entered into a real partnership with governments and parliaments. As the tier of government closest to the ordinary citizen, they could help to create the optimum conditions for respecting human rights in every community, thereby contributing to the Council of Europe's fundamental objectives.

The Congress reflects European countries' commitment to decentralisation, says Ulrich Bohner, outgoing Secretary

General of the Congress, and has made a major contribution to its success. Regionalisation, he adds, has acted as a counterweight to the trend towards the concentration of power at European level.

The Congress took part in all the ceremonies to mark the Council's 60th anniversary, particularly in London, Madrid and Strasbourg. At the 5 May ceremony in London, where the Council of Europe Statute was opened for signature in 1949, the President of the Congress Institutional Committee, Keith Whitmore (UK), said that local and regional democracy was a landmark of European development. He added that the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities "grew out of the conviction that a democratic Europe is being built every day in our communities, in our villages, towns, cities and regions. ... Today, governments, parliaments and local and regional authorities work together as indispensable parts of the democratic machinery created by the Council of Europe".

Addressing the Committee of Ministers' session in Madrid on 12 May, Ian Micallef (Malta), acting President of the Congress since early 2009, spoke of the need to relocalise our societies, and for the Council to make more use of the Congress as a tool that was tailor-made for tackling these problems. The era of globalisation would also be the era of the local community, he said. Even if the good health of local democracy and the quality of local governance still varied in Europe, local democracy today was an accepted fact. Local authorities were the central actors for improving the quality and the sustainability of our life-styles. The immense movement of decentralisation was underway, and was unstoppable.

To mark the progress of local and regional democracy, the Congress organised several events to coincide with its October 2009 session, including a sitting to celebrate the Council of Europe's 60th anniversary, and in particular its achievements in the local and regional domain.

The addresses to the assembled local and regional representatives, by Zlata Plostajner, the Slovenian minister for local self-government and regional development, Peter Altmaier, Parliamentary State Secretary at the German interior ministry, and Alan Meale, Chair of the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, symbolised the importance of the partnership between the three components of democratic power, namely governments, parliaments and local and regional authorities.

Citizen democracy

Citizen participation is the underpinning of local democracy. To emphasise this, the Congress has organised a number of debates, particularly on young people's involvement in local and regional democracy. Practical examples of such participation were presented by the children's municipal council of Schiltigheim, in France, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2009, and by the Strasbourg youth council. Members of the Congress took this opportunity to discuss these questions with Raphaël Nisand, mayor of Schiltigheim, Ambrine Baader, a member of the children's council, and Eloïse Jacob, of the youth council.

Citizen participation also featured largely in the activities to mark the third European Local Democracy Week, in 2009. As one of the authors of this initiative, the Congress reviewed the achievements of the first years of this pan-European event during the debate on youth participation in October. In the discussions, Wolfgang Schuster, Lord Mayor of Stuttgart

(Germany) and a member of the Congress, described the activities of the Cities for Children Network, in which the Congress is an enthusiastic participant, and proposed the drafting of a European charter on the well-being of children in cities.

The celebrations were an opportunity for the Congress to describe its achievements and its expectations to the new Council of Europe Secretary General, Thorbjørn Jagland (Norway), elected in September 2009. In his first formal address in that post, before the Congress, he stressed the importance of the role of local elected members as the political representatives who were most directly confronted with the needs, wishes and demands of their electors. "Politicians are always under pressure to deliver results", he told his audience, "but it is at the local level that this pressure is perhaps most concrete, constant and direct."

The sitting was followed by the inauguration of a photographic exhibition to illustrate the Congress' activities and the progress of local and regional democracy in Europe over the last fifty or more years.

Strengthening the means for monitoring

Despite the steady expansion of its role as guarantor of local and regional democracy, particularly through its monitoring and election observation activities, the Congress has to deal with a significant reduction in its resources, the effects of which are already apparent.

What makes the current restrictions even more serious is the fact that the Congress has expenses that are not faced by other Council of Europe bodies and is also having to take on new responsibilities. According to the report on Congress resources in 2010, presented by Congress Vice-President Jean-Claude Frécon (France) at the March 2009 session, the Congress budget represented 3% of the Council of Europe's overall budget, which was 2.5 times less than that of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Since democracy is an absolute priority of the Council of Europe, alongside human rights, the Congress urged the Committee of Ministers in June 2009 to give the same priority to Council bodies promoting democracy as to those responsible for implementing the European Convention on Human Rights.

According to Ian Micallef, the acting Congress President, the Congress had all the necessary powers and skills to stimulate and support these developments, but the financial constraints

“ We are convinced that a peaceful, prosperous and united Europe is a Europe not only of nation-states, but also a Europe of Regions and Local Communities. ”

Ian Micallef (Malta), acting Congress President, following the adoption of the Declaration on the Council of Europe's 60th anniversary on October 2009.

it was currently facing posed a real threat to its future, even though it was introducing new and rational management and working methods to try to compensate for these cuts.

2009 was the year of the Council of Europe's 60th anniversary but it was also the first year of the Congress' new working methods. Until 2008, it held an annual plenary session. There are now two such sessions each year, in March and October.

New working methods

The new working methods were the main item on the agenda of its Standing Committee meeting in Brdo (Slovenia) on 10 June 2009. Drawing on a report prepared by a former President, Halvdan Skard (Norway), the participants discussed ways of simplifying certain procedures and working methods, and of optimising the treatment of subjects selected for debate. The acting President, Ian Micallef, recommended the outsourcing of certain activities, a recasting of relations with its partners, fund-raising and the development of "early-warning", "rapid-reaction" and "follow-up" mechanisms in connection with its monitoring and investigation activities.

Local and regional democracy beyond Europe

The Congress also continues to co-operate with local and regional authorities outside of Europe. For its debate on challenges for local democracy in the world, at its October session, it welcomed Yasuo Nozaka, mayor of Yonago in Japan, and Antonio Ledezma, mayor of Caracas in Venezuela. Mr Nozaka described the difficulties faced by Japanese local authorities, whose finances were closely controlled by the state, which had also cut them back for economic reasons. Similarly, Mr. Ledezma spoke of his experience of local self-government in his country.

As well as maintaining relations with local authorities in other continents, the Congress also enjoys close ties with its host city, Strasbourg. For example, at the October session the mayor of Strasbourg, Roland Ries, described the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict and the Upper Rhine region, two bodies in which cross-border co-operation is now an integral part of local governance.



Ulrich Bohner

*Outgoing Congress
Secretary General*

“Modesty and
patience are necessary
as regards the progress
of ideas, before
arriving at common
attainments recognised
Europe-wide”

In 2009 we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe. I was born five years before this happy event, when large parts of Europe were still stricken in the ugliest war of history. Yet, a growing number of European leaders started to imagine a new Europe, a Council of Europe that would bring to their populations the dream of reconciliation.

Democracy was part of this challenge: in this way we were the first international organisation to go beyond the Committee of Ministers, through adopting a democratic pillar. Looking at the importance of towns in the development of local democracy, the Parliamentary Assembly took, as early as 1957, the initiative to convene the first European Conference of Local Authorities, representing elected mayors and councillors from all Council of Europe member States.

The Conference has since become the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. During my 38 year career, I have observed the profound development of our European societies with respect to the recognition of the territorial dimension, the tier of government closest to the citizen, so as to counterbalance an unequal concentration of power at European level. In addition European integration and decentralisation are movements which, far from being contradictory, act to complement each other.

Today, more than ever, the Congress' objective is to observe, country by country, the evolution of local and regional democracy, in other words, to carry out monitoring missions, on the basis of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, a Council of Europe convention adopted almost 25 years ago and ratified today by virtually all our member states (44 out of 47). In the Congress we are also convinced that democratic regions will enhance the success of the states to which they belong. This is why we defend with the same strength the plan for the European Charter of Regional Government, which if it were to be adopted by our States could be the regional counterpart to the Charter of Local Self-Government. However I have been compelled to learn during my long career with the Council of Europe that modesty and patience are necessary as regards the progress of ideas before arriving at common attainments recognised Europe wide.



Ian Micallef, acting Congress President (centre), addresses the Ministerial Conference in Utrecht, Netherlands, in November 2009, in the presence of Jean-Claude Frécon, Vice-President of the Congress (left), and Alan Meale, Chairman of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs of the Parliamentary Assembly (right).

Utrecht Conference : Congress enters into dialogue with governments

Ministers approve the reference framework for regional democracy

The 16th session of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government was held in Utrecht (Netherlands) on 16 and 17 November 2009. The Congress, which was strongly represented at the conference, made its own contribution both to the Utrecht Declaration by emphasising the role of local and regional authorities in Europe today, and to the Utrecht Agenda, which identifies the approaches necessary to ensure good local and regional governance.

The challenges that arise regarding good local and regional governance in a period of crisis and change were the focus of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government held in Utrecht (Netherlands) in November 2009.

The ministers looked in particular at the position of the territorial dimension in European democracy, the

ways and means of improving local and regional governance and the Council of Europe's role in strengthening local and regional democracy. The Congress, one of the key players in this area, took part in the debates and set out its positions on the draft Declaration and draft Utrecht Agenda, which were also supported by the Council's Parliamentary Assembly.

Addressing the conference, acting Congress President Ian Micallef stressed the need for constant dialogue between governments and local and regional authorities, at both national and Council of Europe level. He also stressed the fact that governments had to be more active in implementing the Congress' recommendations and that any action to ensure good governance had to involve the local and regional authorities themselves. "Monitoring the quality of local and regional democracy is the sole responsibility of the Congress which is accountable to territorial authorities", he said.

His words were followed up by Congress Vice-President Jean-Claude Frécon (France) and the Chair of the Institutional Committee Keith Whitmore (UK), who underlined the Congress' leading role in monitoring the quality of local and regional democracy in Europe while at the same time pointing out ministers' responsibility to ensure that its proposals were acted upon.

The Congress delegation, which also comprised its Vice-Presidents Dubravka Suica (Croatia) and Onno van Veldhuizen (Netherlands), Karl-Heinz Lambertz (Belgium), Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education, and Jean-Claude Van Cauwenberghe (Belgium), Chair of the ad hoc Working Group on Regions with Legislative Powers, presented its opinion on the main conference report, which had been drawn up by Mari Kiviniemi, the Finnish Minister of Public Administration and Local Government.

Calling for the strengthening of the Council of Europe's work at local and regional level, Ms Kiviniemi suggested increasing the member states' involvement in local and regional policies with a better information system and the creation of common standards and assessment measures. She wished to improve co-operation between the Council of Europe and other international bodies, especially the European Union and the OECD. She also wanted to make the measures carried out more flexible and effective and open up the European bodies responsible for local and regional democracy more widely to civil society while at the same time improving their internal and external communication strategies.

The Congress expressed its support for closer and more productive co-operation between the various entities within the Council of Europe, especially the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR), in the follow-up to the monitoring carried out by the Congress, while at the same time retaining the diversity of structures and the allocation of their responsibilities. The delegation said that the dialogue and consultations between these entities should be strengthened and rendered more effective, not reduced.

A framework for regional democracy

The Congress also expressed its opinion on the draft Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, which the ministers approved at the conference. For the Congress, this is only a temporary compromise and should lead in the longer term to

the adoption of a binding instrument. This document, drawn up by the CDLR, takes account of the European Charter of Regional Democracy, adopted by the Congress in 2008. It was originally supposed to be the "regional" equivalent of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and, like its counterpart, contain binding elements applicable in relations between central government and regions. Rejected by the member states on two occasions, this draft charter has now re-emerged in the form of a "reference framework" with no binding force. For Jean-Claude van Cauwenberghe, the Congress' rapporteur on regionalisation, this framework can be a new starting-point for regional democracy in Europe, even if it has to be seen as an "intermediate step" towards a standard-setting text (charter or convention) in the more distant future.

The Congress also contributed to the discussion of cross-border co-operation issues and discussions on awareness-raising programmes and measures to encourage citizen participation, such as the European Local Democracy Week.

Two new protocols

The ministers reaffirmed their commitment to reducing and ultimately removing the practical and legal obstacles limiting co-operation between local and regional authorities across national borders. Additional Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation (the 1980 Madrid Convention), which is supported by the Congress and was opened for signature by the member states at the

conference, is an innovative legal instrument that should help bring about stronger inter-territorial co-operation.

The ministers then opened for signature by the member states the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on citizen participation. This instrument, which has also been given a favourable opinion by the Congress, guarantees every citizen the right to participate in the affairs of their local authority, first by electing it and then by becoming involved in any consultations, petitions or referendums that it organises. For their part, local authorities are called upon to encourage the exercise of this right, through installing, among other things, the necessary technologies and providing information making it possible to ensure that this right is upheld more effectively.

The conference concluded with the adoption of the Utrecht Declaration, which highlights the leading role to be played by local and regional authorities in order to find a way out of the economic and financial crisis. In this connection, the ministers

“ The Congress calls for a permanent dialogue on different political levels. The Council of Europe's working methods should reflect this principle in order to preserve its diverse structures which make it unique. ”

Jean-Claude Frécon (France), Congress Vice-President, at the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for local and regional government, Utrecht, The Netherlands, November 2009.

drew particular attention to the respective roles of local authorities and central governments, stressing the responsibility of the latter for guaranteeing the resources of local authorities.

Appended to the Declaration was the Utrecht Agenda on the establishment of good local and regional governance for 2010-2013. The Agenda identifies specific challenges of particular significance to all, especially the management of the

economic and financial crisis, the low level of democratic participation in public life at local and regional level and the need to increase the organisational effectiveness of local and regional authority governance. The Utrecht Declaration and Utrecht Agenda represent a renewed basis for action and co-operation in future years between governments and the Congress as partners in the implementation of the measures advocated by these texts.



Jean-Claude van Cauwenberghe

(Belgium)

Congress Rapporteur on regionalisation in Europe

“The reference framework marks a new departure for the promotion of regional democracy in Europe”

Together with several of your fellow Congress members you support the idea of turning the European Charter of Regional Democracy into a “reference framework” for regional democracy. In what main ways would this differ from the Charter, and what advantages would the new text offer?

Jean-Claude van Cauwenberghe: Even if we regret the Ministers’ decision, we were expecting it and we think that the drafting of a “reference framework for regional democracy” will make it possible to continue promoting regional democracy in Europe: it will mark a new departure in our work, whereas if we do nothing we risk losing the benefit of our past efforts. Of course, the new reference framework will not have the legal force of a convention, but, in applying it, states will see that, far from being controversial, the promotion of regional democracy is beneficial both to them and to the regions.

If it is not binding, what force will this reference framework have and how can it be useful to the regions?

Jean-Claude van Cauwenberghe: We are going to breathe life into this text by promoting it and publicising it together with our partners, including the European Committee on Regional Democracy, and we will pursue

this work after its adoption by the Ministerial Conference in Utrecht. This reference framework will be useful for the regional monitoring carried out by the Congress, and should also provide inspiration for states wishing to reorganise their structures on a more regional basis. This document will incorporate, in addition to the draft Charter, the so-called Helsinki principles and will constitute a reference corpus serving the needs of efficient and democratic regional development based on the subsidiarity principle.

Do you intend to continue working within the Congress on a new project which would again take the form of a convention, and, apart from a convention, do you see any alternative mechanism for establishing a legal framework at regional level?

Jean-Claude van Cauwenberghe: Our philosophy and our ideas remain the same and, once again, the reference framework is not an end, but a beginning. It will mark a further political step towards an international legal instrument. With its adoption in Utrecht in November, it will put regionalism back on the agenda and will update certain principles, such as the Helsinki principles, while permitting their practical application. We continue to dream of organising regional self-government at European level by establishing strong principles of subsidiarity, democracy and good governance.



Ambrine Baader, an 11-year-old pupil at secondary school, addresses the Congress members on behalf of the Children's Municipal Council of Schiltigheim, France - October 2009.

Young people at the heart of territorial democracy

European Local Democracy Week,
a Congress initiative to mobilise all citizens

In 2009, over a thousand activities were organised throughout Europe as part of the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW). Three years after it was launched by the Congress, it has become a major annual event for the recognition of local and regional authorities and the promotion of democratic participation at local level in Europe.

The 2009 ELDW was officially launched in Strasbourg (France) on 12 October. Several aspects of local democracy were highlighted, including the participation of foreign nationals, the promotion of youth assemblies and the development of new technologies. "The European Local Democracy Week is a practical way of increasing citizens' participation", said Keith Whitmore (UK), Chair of the Congress's Institutional Committee and ELDW co-ordinator.

Youth Councils

During the session, coinciding with the launch of ELDW in October 2009, the Congress held a debate

on youth participation. As Raphaël Nisand, mayor of Schiltigheim (France), pointed out in his presentation of the Children's Municipal Council of this Alsatian town, which set up the first council of this type in France in 1979, "being involved in the life of the town not only means voting or standing in elections but also providing people with the means of expressing themselves and taking part in local decision-making". These bodies that bring together children and young people elected by their peers not only initiate them in local politics but also enable them to make their voices heard better in the decision-making bodies made up solely of adults.

According to Ambrine Baader, an 11-year-old secondary-school pupil and member of the Schiltigheim Children's Municipal Council, "by discussing issues together we help to improve the town by making ourselves useful". She felt it would be a good idea if European children were also able to come together in a joint forum.

The Strasbourg Youth Council, represented by 14-year-old Eloïse Jacob, also took part in the debate. She said

that “its 130 elected representatives make the Youth Council a body bursting with life. It enables young people to discover how the municipality operates and to be part of decision-making”.

The need to take account of children in towns is also an issue championed by Wolfgang Schuster, the Lord Mayor of Stuttgart (Germany). The initiator of an extensive municipal programme entitled “Cities for Children”, aimed at improving the well-being of children in towns, he called on the Congress to promote similar measures in all European towns. “Without such measures, our towns are in danger of turning into huge retirement homes”, he said during the Congress debate on youth participation in democracy.

Equal access to elections

During ELDW, a panel discussion on the position of foreign residents in European local democracy processes was also held by the City of Strasbourg (France) in partnership with the Congress and the CLIP network (Network of European Cities for Local Integration Policies for Migrants). Mahboob Khan (UK), a member of the Congress, took part in this event in order to look at the processes that enable foreign residents to participate at local level and consider their social impact.

In addition, in October 2009 the Congress adopted a recommendation on Equal Access to Local and Regional Elections, which reflects these key principles, including gender equality on candidate lists and the right to vote and stand for election for all inhabitants who have lived for at least three years in the place where the election is being held. This recommendation calls on local and regional authorities to ensure that all candidates have equal access to the media and that voters have the electoral material they need to make their choice. In addition, young people, who too often shun the ballot box, should be encouraged by specific initiatives to turn out in greater numbers at elections, and people with disabilities or physical or sensory impairments should be able to obtain special assistance, to enable them to travel without difficulty to the polling stations and vote for their choice of candidate(s).

Tools for strengthening participation

At its October 2009 session, the Congress adopted a resolution and recommendation on electronic democracy. It called on

local and regional authorities to make use of online tools to improve the transparency and effectiveness of local government. For example, citizens and elected representatives could hold political debates on local issues, or the municipalities could put their deliberations and decisions online. Other initiatives were encouraged, such as the provision of free Internet access points in public places. However, the texts adopted also stress the risks inherent in electronic democracy, especially with regard to the protection of users’ privacy.

In June 2009, at its meeting in Brdo (Slovenia), the Standing Committee also voiced its support for the Code of Good

Practice for Civil participation in the Decision-Making Process, adopted by the Council of Europe INGO Conference. In its opinion, the Congress stated that this code “sets down, in a realistic manner, concrete principles for civil participation at all levels of the political decision-making process” and “provides practical guidance supporting the implementation of elements of direct democracy”.

The instruments to encourage participation also include an Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which gives a new dimension to the Charter by providing an international legal guarantee of the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority. This text was opened for signature in November 2009 at the Conference of European Ministers responsible

for Local and Regional Government held in Utrecht (Netherlands).

Giving a boost to the ELDW in 2010

The European Local Democracy Week was also on the agenda of the Utrecht Conference. “The European Local Democracy Week calls for innovative methods to increase citizen participation”, said Ank Bijleveld-Schouten, State Secretary for the Interior and Kingdom Relations in the Dutch Ministry of the Interior. At the conference, the acting President of the Congress Ian Micallef welcomed the decision of the European Union’s Committee of the Regions to take part in the next ELDW. “This agreement is an important step for the further strengthening of the ELDW. The commitment of the Committee of the Regions, our partner organisation in the EU, will contribute to making this concept one of the major events on the calendar of the 47 Council of Europe member states”, said the ELDW political co-ordinator Keith Whitmore.

“ *The European Local Democracy Week is an important initiative as its primary objective is to boost citizen interest and participation in local politics. The Committee of Ministers supports this project which has already taken on significant proportions, both in size and impact.* ”

Zlata Plostajner (Slovenia), Minister responsible for local self-government and regional development, on behalf of the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, October 2009.



In December 2009, the Congress carried out a mission to assess the situation of local and regional democracy in Belgium. Congress Rapporteurs Michel Guégan (France) and Dobrica Milovanović (Serbia) met heads and representatives of government of Belgian regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels-Capital), as well as the Minister-President of the German-Speaking Community.

Congress safeguards the health of local democracy

For a more effective monitoring of the 47 Council of Europe member states

Promoting local and regional democracy and monitoring it in the Council of Europe's member states remains the Congress' key task. In 2009, the Congress continued its monitoring activities to ensure due application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government across the continent. Its monitoring mechanism includes country reports, discussions with government officials on action taken in response to Congress recommendations, fact-finding missions and local and regional election observation missions. This repertory of tools is one of the Congress' strengths and these activities are also its most visible at international level.

The Congress is being increasingly called upon to respond to situations that are of particular concern for the proper functioning of local and regional democracy; to monitor the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government more rigorously and to intervene more frequently when allegations of breaches of its provisions are made. Its monitoring activities also help local and regional authorities to take up the challenges facing their communities, whether linked to the economic and financial crisis, climate change, and the provision of public services, or the management of fiscal resources.

The Congress carried out five monitoring missions in 2009: in Turkey from 12 to 14 January, in Switzerland from 25 to

27 May, in Iceland from 15 to 17 June, in Russia from 16 to 17 December and in Belgium from 16 to 18 December. Switzerland, Iceland and Belgium were among the last seven Council of Europe member states never having been visited in this regard, the four others being Austria, Montenegro, Serbia and France. With these three missions, the Congress has virtually completed the first round of monitoring all the 44 countries that have ratified the Charter, i.e. all the member states apart from Andorra, Monaco and San Marino.

The mission to Switzerland, led by Congress Rapporteur Jean-Claude van Cauwenberghe (Belgium), examined inter alia the distribution of powers between the federal authorities, cantons and local authorities, as well as the state of cantonal financial autonomy and the machinery for consulting the cantons on federal projects and decisions.

The mission to Iceland was of particular significance owing to the extremely severe financial crisis into which the country was plunged in 2008. Congress Rapporteur Esther Maurer (Switzerland) said she was impressed by the "solidarity between municipal and national levels in dealing with the challenge presented by the crisis" and observed that, far from paralysing Iceland's political representatives, whether at the national or the municipal level, this crisis had inspired them to seek out innovative solutions together.

In addition, two other monitoring missions were carried out in December, one in Belgium and the other in Russia, to study the application of the Charter in those countries.

Regarding Belgium the Congress voiced its dissatisfaction in April, through its rapporteur Michel Guégan (France), concerning the intransigence of the Flemish Interior Minister on the matter of the refusal to appoint three French-speaking mayors in the Flemish region. This situation had been the subject of a debate in December 2008 and led to a recommendation calling on the Flemish authorities to appoint the mayors or hold new elections. According to the rapporteur, "the Flemish authorities have not taken into consideration the Congress's recommendation. By acting in this way, they have deliberately reached a political impasse."

In May, the draft law amending the rules on local self-government in Russia was submitted to the Bureau of the Congress. This introduces a new mechanism that permits the dismissal of mayors by municipal councils on the initiative of the regional governor. The Bureau considered that the dismissal of mayors without consulting the population that had elected them and without the possibility of an appeal might be incompatible with the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which the Russian Federation ratified in 1998. The monitoring mission in December was asked to investigate this matter.

During the year, the Bureau also discussed matters relating to the situation of local democracy, especially in Azerbaijan, Latvia, Moldova, Romania and Turkey. It decided to send a fact-finding mission to Moldova following complaints from local authority associations and asked the Institutional Committee to examine complaints from several associations of local and regional authorities in Romania and to organise a monitoring mission to that country. The Bureau also continued to monitor the situation of foreign residents in Latvia, in the light of the Congress' recommendation of December 2008, calling on the Latvian authorities to grant them the right to vote in local elections.

As far as Azerbaijan is concerned, the Congress was asked to consider the situation following the referendum of 18 March approving several amendments to the Constitution, despite the criticism voiced by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission. After the referendum, the Bureau stressed the need to ensure that the new laws on local and regional self-government, to be adopted in light of these constitutional amendments, comply with the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

The acting President of the Congress, Ian Micallef, visited Azerbaijan from 10 to 14 September to assess the situation of local

democracy there. Before his visit, he again called on the Azerbaijani authorities to join the other countries of the South Caucasus in electing rather than appointing the mayor of its capital city, Baku. "The first-ever election of the Mayor of Yerevan in Armenia in May this year, and the initiative of the Georgian President in favour of the direct election of the Mayor of Tbilisi have created democratic momentum in the South Caucasus. With a view to its municipal elections in December, Azerbaijan should follow these positive examples", he said.

After this visit, Ian Micallef stated that the government had decided to consult the Venice Commission and the Congress in order to make progress on the path to local self-government and decentralisation. "Much remains to be done in Azerbaijan with regard to the consolidation of territorial structures. At present, local democracy is a rather vague and abstract concept", he said, concluding that the December municipal elections would make it possible to see if the poll actually measured up to the assurances given.

“ Congress leads in monitoring territorial democracy, Ministers are responsible for acting on its recommendations. ”

Keith Whitmore (UK), President of the Congress Institutional Committee, at the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for local and regional government, Utrecht, The Netherlands, November 2009.

In November, the acting President also paid an official visit to Albania to enquire about the progress of local democracy in that country, with particular reference to the complaints by several mayors concerning difficulties with the decentralisation process. He called on the Albanian president to act as a mediator between the central government and local and regional authorities in order to find solutions to these problems.

From 12 to 14 January Congress rapporteurs Anders Knape (Sweden) and Herwig van Staa (Austria) paid a visit to Turkey, a country already "examined" several times in connection with the monitoring of local

democracy, in order to discuss the present state of application of the Charter of Local Self-Government, and obtain additional information on the situation of certain mayors in the south-east of the country. In August, the Congress welcomed the new initiatives taken by the Turkish government to resolve the "Kurdish issue", which it hopes will also contribute to consolidating local democracy in Turkey. The Turkish-Armenian rapprochement concurrently set in motion was also welcomed by the Congress, which is encouraging Turkey to "continue on the path of reform".

Lastly, in order to assess the level of incorporation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in the legal systems of the states that have ratified it, in May the Congress prepared a report on this subject via a group of independent experts. This will enable the level of judicial protection available to local self-government to be assessed. Many European countries, such as Malta, which is currently carrying out an extensive local democracy reform plan, recognise that they owe their system of local self-government largely to the work done by the Congress.



A delegation composed of 11 Congress members representing 8 Council of Europe countries monitored the vote in about 100 polling stations, during the municipal elections in Azerbaijan, in December 2009.

Congress mission in the field: election observation

Skopje, Yerevan, Baku: Congress elected representatives assess the quality of electoral democracy

On 22 March 2009, the Congress observed the local elections in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (FYROM) followed by the first mayoral elections in Yerevan, Armenia on 31 May, and finally, the municipal elections in Azerbaijan, on 23 December.

The Congress delegation to FYROM, led by Ludmila Sfirloaga (Romania), President of the Chamber of Regions, concluded that these elections had generally complied with international standards despite a few isolated problems, but regretted that the presidential election held at the same time directed attention away from the issues of the local elections. Although the large number of candidates and parties gave the voters a genuine choice, nevertheless the observers noted that there was still, to some extent, an atmosphere of mistrust, as could be seen from the numerous worrying allegations of election-related pressure or intimidation, especially targeting public employees, during the pre-election period.

Of particular interest to the Congress, both because of their importance for the future of local democracy in Armenia and because they serve as an example, the elections to the Yerevan municipal council – whereby the mayor of the capital was to be elected for the first time – were the subject of a “pre-electoral visit” on 4 and 5 May. During

this visit, a Congress delegation, led by Nigel Mermagen (UK), was able to meet parties and government representatives, the media and the electoral bodies. The Congress, which was the only international observer present during the elections, had the satisfaction of seeing the inhabitants of this city finally elect their representatives, albeit “tempered by deficiencies in the conduct of the vote”. It called on all the country’s politicians to “change their attitudes and behaviour” with a view to improving the country’s democratic culture in future. A recommendation adopted in October echoed all the observations made during the election.

Lastly, after lengthy preparations and numerous meetings, a delegation led by Gaye Doğanoglu (Turkey), President of the Sustainable Development Committee, observed the municipal elections in Azerbaijan on 23 December. Although the Congress, which had also carried out a pre-electoral visit to the country in early December, concluded that they had been properly organised, it noted deficiencies with regard to compliance with the principle of pluralism during the campaign. The absence of genuine debates with participants from all sides, especially in the media, gave the impression that there were no issues involved in these elections and, as the Congress delegation sadly pointed out, the outcome was a low voter turnout.

Relaunching political dialogue with Minsk

Congress initiates a new co-operation process with Belarus authorities

Relations between the Congress and Belarus, which have for several years been confined to the attendance of one organisation holding observer status at Congress sessions, were boosted in 2009 with the development of a co-operation project on local democracy in this country. In June, this project, which is geared to helping Belarusian local authorities to adopt a genuine legal and institutional framework for self-government at a time when the State is still omnipresent at local and regional authority level, was ratified by the Standing Committee of the Congress.

In December 2008, the Congress granted observer status to the Council for Co-operation of Local Self-Government Bodies, which operates under the authority of the Council of the Republic, the upper house of the National Assembly of Belarus. This Council thus joined the Lev Sapieha Foundation, which has held observer status since 2001, as another organisation entitled to participate in the work of the Congress. Its Chairperson, Boris Batura, who is also President of the Council of the Republic, addressed the Congress at the March 2009 session.

On this occasion, the Congress initiated consultations with the national authorities and the two observers

on a co-operation project in the field of local self-government. It was decided to begin by organising a Round Table on the conformity of Belarusian legislation to the European Charter of Local Self-Government and to mandate Council of Europe experts to assess the draft law on local self-government in Belarus. According to the President of the Congress, Ian Micallef, "these initial steps should lead to broader co-operation between the Congress and the political forces and civil society in Belarus at local level in order to promote democratic changes in that country".

A Belarusian delegation was invited to the meeting of the Congress' Standing Committee in Slovenia in June 2009, in order to take part in the debate on local and regional self-government and the prospects for co-operation with their country. The co-operation project, which was presented during this debate, comprised the following three pillars: the Round Table on the democratic principles of local self-government and analysis of Belarusian legislation; the setting up of a national association of local authorities; and training for local councillors and their administrations.



A Belarusian delegation, led by Anatoly Rubinov (left), Vice-President of the Council for Co-operation of Local Self-Government Bodies, took part in the meeting of the Congress Standing Committee, in June 2009, in Slovenia.

The Belarusian representatives pointed out that the elected local bodies in their country were hoping to set up their own institutional structure and to step up their co-operation with the Congress. Anatoly Rubinov, Vice-Chairperson of the Council for Co-operation of Local Self-Government Bodies, mentioned the possibility of setting up an association of local authorities and invited the Congress to analyse the legal framework for local self-government in his country.

Structures for Belarusian local authorities

According to Miroslav Kobasa, President of the Lev Sapieha Foundation, who sent a message to the Committee, Belarus has a local self-government system operating under the control of the national authorities, whereby the local authorities are actually organs of the State Administration. In his message he stressed the shortcomings of this system, including the lack of democratic procedure, transparency and independence

“ Belarus is ready to step up co-operation with the Congress. ”

Anatoly Rubinov, Vice-President of the Council for Co-operation of Local Self-Government Bodies of Belarus.

on the part of local self-government bodies, and the limited scope of their competences. This situation means that co-operation with the Congress is vital in order to involve the local authorities in joint projects. Through opening a dialogue with Belarusian local authorities, the Congress can simultaneously alert the country's central authorities to the advantages of these political developments, in the opinion of the Lev Sapieha Foundation, which is working for the introduction of local self-government in Belarus and sees the Congress as the partner best able to help it achieve this goal.

However, continued relations with Belarus will require the latter to accept the Council of Europe's standards, primarily in the area of human rights. To this end, the acting President of the Congress joins with the Parliamentary Assembly in demanding a moratorium on the death penalty as an essential precondition for continued dialogue.



Miroslav Kobasa
(Belarus)

*President of the
Lev Sapieha Foundation*

“There is no alternative to co-operation with the Congress”

What is the state of local and regional self-government in Belarus today?

Miroslav Kobasa: In Belarus the concept applied is one of state-run local self-government. In reality citizens are kept out of the decision-making process at local level and people receive very little in the way of information on the activities of local authorities. In many fundamental ways, Belarus legislation on local self-government does not comply with the principles and standards of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

What steps need to be taken to improve the situation, and how can the Congress help you in this regard?

Miroslav Kobasa: Three initial steps could be taken. First, the drawing up and adoption of a Blueprint for the reform of local self-government in the Republic of Belarus. For this, we need a real assessment of the state of local self-government in the Republic as compared with the principles and standards of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Furthermore, we expect the creation of an association of local and regional authorities of Belarus and finally, guarantees of transparency in local authority activities. The Congress has taken a whole host of decisions aimed at these issues. Expert assistance would be most useful for Belarusian specialists.

What can the municipalities and regions of your country gain from this co-operation?

Miroslav Kobasa: Politically speaking, co-operation must ultimately lead Belarus to membership of the Council of Europe. And, in my opinion, this is a real and fairly short-term prospect. There is no alternative to co-operation. Time and patience are needed, and there will be results.



The crisis requires public investment of which almost two-thirds today are made by European communities.

Territorial authorities facing the crisis

International financial crisis hits our communities hard and narrows their scope for action

In spite of the billions pumped into the system by central governments and although the financial base of the sub-national public sector is generally sound, the effects of the 2008 financial crash were also felt in Europe's towns, cities and regions. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe responded to the economic recession by holding a debate on the consequences of the international financial crisis for local and regional authorities. Its Committee on Social Cohesion also presented a report on means of combating excessive debt among the most vulnerable households, as well as on the integration of migrants, who are particularly vulnerable in this time of crisis.

"The impact of the crisis on local and regional authorities is both direct and indirect", said Günther Krug (Germany), Vice-President of the Congress, when introducing the debate at the Spring Session in March 2009. "Their resources are declining at a time when their services should be doing more and their local economies need support. Moreover, the crisis brings uncertainties and leads to pessimism at all levels", he added.

How should local and regional councillors respond? What measures could be taken? What assistance would local and regional authorities need? Those were the questions which were discussed by the

participants, who gave accounts of their own experience as elected representatives.

Maurice Vincent (France), Mayor of Saint-Etienne, President of Saint-Etienne Métropole and a member of the Rhône-Alpes regional council, pointed out that “European local authorities carry out nearly two-thirds of public investment, which has grown by 3.2% in volume since 2000. Their debt has risen by 3.9% since then but is only 5.8% of GDP.”

According to him, the excesses of a far too poorly regulated financial system had led to a frenetic search for profits by promoting and distributing high-risk products throughout the system. Many local authorities had been hit by the collapse of these products and had seen an explosion in their debts, so it was important to carry out appropriate debt-securitisation policies in order to preserve investment capacity and protect future generations from potentially significant costs.

Given the crisis, local authorities needed to reassess their debts and loans and put their finances on a sounder footing, while also preparing for the recovery, according to the speakers.

Diminished resources

“In Saint-Etienne”, explained Maurice Vincent, “businesses are experiencing a downturn. Layoffs, especially in the car industry, are causing public concern.”

For local authorities, the consequences of the decline in business activity would be automatically reflected in a reduction in their tax income. In such circumstances, it would be difficult to avoid raising local taxes. The authorities were also suffering from the banks’ reluctance to grant new loans.

This point of view was shared by Congress member Ioannis Stratakis (Greece), who said that “global economic development will necessarily weigh heavily on local and regional authorities, which risk seeing their resources diminish, whether they consist of general grants or local tax revenue.” In his view, if social cohesion was to be preserved, it was necessary to avoid cutting the resources available to local authorities, which would have an immediate and direct impact on inhabitants.

“The crisis makes public investment necessary in order to provide companies with work”, emphasised Adrien Zeller, President of Alsace Regional Council (France), on behalf of the Assembly of European Regions. “Local and regional authorities are well placed to launch initiatives in that area

and should therefore invest to create employment and play their part in the economic revival. That applies all the more as 70% of public investment in France is now underpinned by the local, département and regional authorities. If those tiers of government do not do their work, the crisis will become more serious.”

Such investment must be supported at national level, as pointed out by Congress Vice-President Svetlana Orlova, Representative of the Kemerovo Regional Parliament in the Russian Federal Assembly (Russian Federation). “The international crisis shows the need to co-operate and draw up joint policies.” This was also the approach followed by Spain, which had set up a State Fund for Local Investment, with funds of 8 billion euros. “The fund aims to carry out urgent actions, particularly for job creation”, said Maria Tena, Director General of the Spanish Ministry of Local Administration, in her address to the Congress on behalf of the Spanish chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

“ *Our resources are declining at a time when our services should be doing more.* ”

Günther Krug (Germany), Vice-President of the Congress, Spring Session, March 2009.

Maintaining social cohesion

The Congress pointed out that the crisis must not be used as an argument for reducing social expenditure, which served to soften the blow of the crisis. Without such expenditure, the crisis would be even more serious for the most disadvantaged groups and, in the long term, for society as a whole. “Europe should find a way out of the crisis by restoring the confidence of its

citizens and without leaving any section of the population – such as those with disabilities – by the wayside”, stressed Svetlana Orlova during the debate in March.

To put this call into effect, the Congress in October 2009 adopted a recommendation and a resolution underlining the role which regions can play in preventing over-indebtedness of households, which called, in particular, for lending to be made “more ethical” and for improved arrangements for helping individuals with high levels of debt, whose number is also increasing because of the crisis.

The crisis is affecting consumption by the most vulnerable families, who have to take on excessive debts or accept usurious practices in order to meet their basic needs. The relevant report, which was drawn up by the Committee on Social Cohesion and presented at the October session by Congress member Carmen Patrizia Muratore (Italy), advocated control of lending practices and put forward the idea of devising a European model for a code of good practice under the aegis of

the Council of Europe in order to make all the players in the credit chain aware of their responsibilities.

Through its Committee on Social Cohesion, the Congress has continued and extended other activities involving cohesion and solidarity, in particular the programmes to combat domestic violence against women, as well as efforts to promote the rights of children in cities and Roma rights and culture.

In its resolution on preventing violence against children, the Congress stresses that this violence has also “a socio-economic impact on the community as a whole”. The adopted texts emphasise local and regional authorities’ role in strategies to protect children, particularly with regard to networking, applying qualitative parameters and monitoring prevention policies. The Congress also calls for legislative changes to the national laws in order to secure children’s rights, and for the introduction of a national action plan.

Vulnerable population groups

The financial crisis has also highlighted the fragility of certain population groups, in particular immigrants. “Foreigners are often employed in the building and service sectors. That was why they had felt the full force of the credit crunch: in January 2009, almost 28 % of the unemployed were foreigners, and the figure was almost 40 % in the building trade”, stated Isaac Albert, Deputy Mayor of Terrassa (Spain), during the debate on “Equality and diversity in local authority employment and service provision”, in March 2009.

Here again, local communities have the power and the duty to encourage social integration. This is what Congress member Esther Maurer (Switzerland) reminded us when presenting the second report based on the work of the European network of Cities for Local Integration Policies, CLIP, network co-founded by the Congress. “Although unimpeded access to the employment market, both public and private, was a factor in integration, no-one could harbour any illusions: unemployment affected everyone. A growing number of nationals were looking in vain for jobs, sometimes for years, to the point where they were indignant to find that the public authorities were devoting their energies to integrating immigrants.” The resolution adopted by the Congress proposes concrete measures to promote immigrant integration, to ensure egalitarian recruitment procedures and to provide training on intercultural awareness to municipal staff.



Maurice Vincent
(France)

Mayor of Saint Etienne

“Putting
our finances on
a sound footing
to prepare for
the end of
the crisis”

What is your analysis of the crisis and what is your advice to local elected representatives to deal with the situation?

Maurice Vincent : I would call on mayors whose municipalities have contracted variable rate loans, the notorious “toxic” loans, to renegotiate them with the banks, as they could turn out to be time bombs, not in the immediate future, but around 2020 or 2040. In Saint Etienne for example, we are trying to bring down our total proportion of “risky” borrowings from 65% to 20% of our debts by 2014, even if this means initially paying a little more interest. However, this policy is essential for long-term security.

These financial negotiations are perhaps not quite so easy for ordinary citizens. What can they expect in the years to come?

Maurice Vincent : If economic activity falls, then both local and national tax revenue will also fall. I am concerned that states, more in debt than municipalities, will pass on new charges to them, with the end result that local taxes will inevitably rise or that we will have larger debts. At the same time, a reduction in activity means higher unemployment and more social welfare expenditure which must also be financed.

What can local authorities do to prepare for the end of the crisis and support the economy?

Maurice Vincent : The key for the future lies in investment, especially in sustainable development. In Saint Etienne, we will be investing 210 million euros to renovate certain neighbourhoods and reduce energy consumption in public buildings, in particular schools. We also have new projects for science and technology parks, which are the source of jobs and employment in the long term.



Congress Vice-President Dubravka Suica (Croatia) addresses a meeting on citizens' mobilisation for climate protection, at the Copenhagen Summit, in December.

Climate : Copenhagen disappointment alarms our communities

After the Copenhagen Summit, local responses
to environmental challenges needed as never before

Throughout 2009 the Congress urged local and regional authorities to join forces to ensure that their voices were heard at the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December. It defended the role which these authorities can and must play in order to mitigate the effects of climate change and adapt to concomitant risks. Following Copenhagen, the acting President of the Congress, Ian Micallef, appealed to towns and regions to continue their action against global warming, without waiting for an intergovernmental agreement.

Local and regional authorities are vital partners in any agreement regarding the climate – this was the position adopted by the Congress at the UN

Conference on Climate Change held in the Danish capital in December 2009. For the Congress, action against climate change must go beyond mitigation and adaptation, beyond reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the use of renewable energy sources. It is also a question of good governance and the right to a healthy environment.

Even if the final results of the Conference fell short of observers' hopes and expectations, in the absence of an agreement on mandatory targets – described by the acting Congress President as “a missed opportunity”, – the local and regional authorities showed their determination to intensify their efforts to safeguard the climate.

Acting together in Copenhagen

The Congress delegation to Copenhagen, led by Vice-President Dubravka Suica (Croatia), worked closely with the EU Committee of the Regions, ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). They became involved in the Local Government Climate Roadmap action group and the Climate Summit for Mayors, in order to speak with one voice and send out a strong message to governments.

In the conviction that the member states must take advantage of the competences, capacities, experience and commitment of local and regional authorities, the Congress launched an appeal for the inclusion of local and regional action in the future agreement. While, in Europe, towns are among the main polluters, they are also the first to suffer the consequences of climate change. Nevertheless local and regional authorities play a primary role in improving the quality and sustainability of our lifestyles, by prompting their populations to radically change the organisation of their daily lives and their consumer habits.

Vice-President Suica, Vice-President Günther Krug (Germany) and the Chairperson of the Committee on Sustainable Development, Gaye Doganoglu (Turkey) stressed that the towns and regions must be able to provide effective support for national strategies and actions and intensify their role in combating climate change and adapting to its effects. Local and regional authorities represent the optimum government level for alerting and mobilising the general public. However, in order to do so they need political and financial support from international organisations and from national governments.

A well-planned contribution

The Congress' contribution to the Copenhagen Conference had been prepared over several years, through its work in the field of sustainable development and climate change. This work has concerned a range of fields in which local action plays a crucial role, e.g. measures to encourage responsible and sustainable consumption, or to establish a "new energy culture" with particular reference to local energy production, besides schemes to reduce the vulnerability of towns and cities to the consequences of global warming, by promoting forms of public transport which are both more attractive to the users and more eco-friendly, and through improved water management policies.

In March 2009 the Congress took part in the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul, geared towards promoting a global policy for the protection and enhancement of water resources. Two days were specifically given over to the role of local and regional authorities in this field.

The Congress' contribution, which it debated in plenary session at the beginning of March 2009, highlighted the need for local responsibility for water and sewage services in order to make them more efficient and cost-effective, and to guarantee equal access. During the Forum, over 250 municipalities signed the Istanbul Water Consensus which calls upon towns and cities to act to improve their systems of water management in order to meet the challenges of urbanisation and climate change. The Congress, which has been deeply committed to the development of this Consensus, in respect to local and regional authorities, regretted the failure of governments to take this into account in the final documents by formally acknowledging the role and competences of local authorities as regards water management and sanitation, respecting the principle of subsidiarity.

In June the Congress made its contribution to the "Local Government Climate Change Leadership Summit", which was also held in Copenhagen. It advocated taking more systematic account of local and regional authorities in political decisions on climate, and underlined the interdependence between climate change and human rights. Several debates, including a presentation of practical activities

conducted in a number of towns, provided dynamic, innovative examples of adaptation measures and methods for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and showed how European local authorities are taking up the challenge of climate change.

Local and regional authorities worldwide attended this Summit in order to reaffirm the vital role which they have to play in combating climate change and to initiate dialogue with national governments on this issue. Together they adopted a common front for the Copenhagen Conference, stressing that no global action plan on climate could succeed unless they too were closely involved.

Furthermore, at the end of October a European workshop concerning the impact of climate change on marine risks was held in Murcia (Spain). It was an opportunity for the Congress to present its work on protecting coastal towns from rising sea levels – an activity which continued in

“ The financial and economic crisis should not be a pretext for reducing the resources allocated to sustainable development, which, in the present climate change context, is the century’s biggest challenge. ”

Fernanda Cecchini (Italy), Congress member

December 2009 at the meeting of the Committee on Sustainable Development.

At its second session in October 2009, the Congress emphasised the need for local responses to the global challenge of climate change, calling on local and regional authorities to seek innovative solutions to protect the environment and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The adopted recommendation highlighted the vital role of local and regional action for climate, which must be supported at national level and integrated into any climate change strategy.

After Copenhagen

At the December Summit the acting President of the Congress, Ian Micallef, invited governments to “support local and sub-national governments politically, financially and technologically” in order to help them create more environment- and climate-friendly towns.

He said that although the Summit had not been a great success in terms of results, local and regional authorities would continue their action “In the face of the global challenge that threatens the very future of our planet, the lack of agreement on binding targets, the lack of commitment to resolute mitigation and adaptation measures is nothing but alarming and irresponsible”, he added, just after the Copenhagen Conference.

“Local and regional authorities worldwide will pursue their action to combat global warming without delay, and put pressure on governments to recognise and support their activities. We must work to adapt our communities and reduce their vulnerability. We must take innovative steps to reduce carbon emissions in our territories. We must work for better governance and demand stronger institutional capacities at local and regional level. And we must set ambitious targets for ourselves, without waiting for our governments to take a more positive attitude. Climate change won't wait.”

Local and regional authorities themselves are prepared to change their policies and attitudes in order to fulfil these requirements, while promoting their citizens to do likewise in their everyday lives. This is the Congress' message at all the major international encounters.



**Iñigo de la Serna
Hernáiz** (*Spain*)

*Mayor of Santander,
capital of Cantabria*

“Rising sea
levels threaten
the 70 million
Europeans living
in coastal
regions”

Many natural or inhabited areas of the city are threatened by erosion. What are the main effects of rising sea levels?

Iñigo de la Serna Hernáiz : Rising sea levels not only have negative effects on coasts and beaches but exacerbate erosion, modify the salinity of freshwater and increase the force of the waves in storms. Moreover, our coastal regions are becoming more urbanised whilst changes in the natural environment make their infrastructures more vulnerable. All coastal countries are affected by these phenomena and 70 million Europeans are threatened in the long run by these changes.

In practical terms, what methods can be used to slow down this phenomenon?

Iñigo de la Serna Hernáiz : We have two types of response to help mitigate the rise in the water level: on the one hand, combating the greenhouse effect, which should be everyone's responsibility, and so-called adaptation measures, which must be taken at local level. In Santander we are now giving priority to renewable energies. At the same time, we are planning to build protective dykes, and of course we are preparing new urban plans. There is no question, for example, of authorising new building in areas which are or will be threatened by the rise in water levels.

In the context of the Copenhagen Summit, what would you like to say to governmental representatives?

Iñigo de la Serna Hernáiz : I would like to remind them that while the phenomenon is global, the responses to it are first of all local. We can act locally, but we need help from the government to gain a better understanding of the phenomena involved. To save our coasts, we need to gain a better understanding of the Atlantic, and we cannot do that by ourselves.



The Congress Committee on Culture and Education organised a seminar on "Diverse cities, creative cities" on 19 September in Bydgoszcz (Poland).

Intercultural relations in cities, guarantee of social cohesion

Congress supports local policies for cultural diversity

Drawing strength from its experience since 2006, the year when the "12 Guidelines for interfaith dialogue at local level" were adopted, the Congress reaffirmed the importance that the intercultural dimension has for cities, promoting cohesion between the different communities and enabling innovative and creative cultural policies to be developed. The Congress also took an interest in the major cultural changes brought about by new technologies, such as "electronic democracy".

The "Intercultural Cities" programme was started by the Council of Europe and the European Commission in 2008. By offering its own support in 2009, the Congress gave new impetus to its action to promote intercultural dialogue at local level. Through this programme, which is intended to help cities to encourage exchanges between the cultures of persons of a variety of origins, a balance is sought between the concepts of identity, inclusion and exclusion. In practical terms, this meeting with

others and this promotion of dialogue may take place in schools, homes, in the social services and leisure sectors, serving to bring mutual understanding where once there was hostility or confrontation.

In accordance with the concept of the intercultural town or city, municipal policies are targeted on these areas, and public places are so designed that persons of different cultural origins are able to mingle and communicate with one another, so as to improve mutual understanding. Moving on from the "multicultural" model to one of "interculturalism", intercultural cities have given a clear undertaking to develop, promote and protect cultural identities in their municipalities, acknowledging that the strength and dynamism of these identities are of crucial importance to cities' development and vitality.

Intercultural cities: a commitment by European cities

At its March session, the Congress focused on local means and measures with a view to building true "inter-cultural" relations and a stronger dialogue between the different religious and ethnic communities. Six municipalities, representing the 12 European cities participating in the "Intercultural Cities" programme, compared their experience in this field at a round table session organised by the Committee on Culture and Education and the Chamber of Local Authorities.

The mayors of Berlin-Neukölln (Germany), Lublin (Poland), Melitopol (Ukraine) and Reggio Emilia (Italy), as well as the deputy mayor of Lyon (France) and the cantonal commissioner for foreign nationals of the Canton of Neuchâtel (Switzerland), presented the programmes drawn up by their municipalities to promote cultural identities and diversity, as well as the exchanges which took place between ethnic, religious and social groups. They gave examples of good practices in respect of conflict and risk management in the context of the preparation of inclusive local policies.

The debate focused on several issues: the role of immigrant women in the integration process, the contribution made by the media, the possible consequences of financial crises and the human rights context. On this last-named topic, the mayor of Berlin-Neukölln, Heinz Buschkowsky, explained that, in certain fields, conflict could arise between the protection of human rights and integration policies. This situation necessitated far-reaching conciliation efforts, without jeopardising common European values or fundamental rights and freedoms. Véronique Moreira (France), a member of the Congress, pointed

out that the urban model set out in the "European Urban Charter II – Manifesto for a new urbanity" laid sound foundations for a strengthening of the local intercultural dimension.

A recommendation and resolution adopted at the end of the round table session called on local authorities to commit themselves to an intercultural political approach, acknowledge the usefulness of each community's contribution and encourage the development of multiple cultural identities.

This commitment could be demonstrated through training and awareness-raising programmes, greater involvement of immigrants in local action and the initiation of dialogues between cultural groups. It is for the authorities to make diversity an effective part of their administrative policy: it is in practice important to involve and integrate immigrants more as municipal employees.

In December 2009, the Congress played a part in the "Forum of the Intercultural Cities" held in Bari, Italy. This focused on the pilot projects successfully carried out by several intercultural cities, particularly Reggio Emilia (Italy), Patras (Greece), Berlin-Neukölln (Germany) and Turin (Italy). And a case study relating to Belgium was also presented during the workshop session on migration, participation, media and citizenship.

Addressing the Forum, Congress member Giuseppina Marmo (Italy) said that interculturalism was based on the idea that cultures were living entities which would develop and change as they encountered other cultures. She described this approach as one that needed to be implemented first at local level, where interaction between the various cultures and ethnic groups was at its most tangible. In her view, interculturalism was the best way of achieving social cohesion and sustainable urban development, since it fostered pluralism, justice and equality of opportunity within local communities.

Creativity and technologies at the service of citizens

Interaction between cultures not only brings people together, but is also in itself a source of creativity, according to the Congress. The intercultural dimension makes cities and their local heritage culturally richer. Enhancing this heritage is one of the aims of the "creative cities" concept, another path being followed by the Committee on Culture and Education. This concept, whereby promotion of local heritage is encouraged as a source of creativity, was the

*“ Mutual integration
of different cultural
communities helps a
city to flourish. ”*

*Dmytro Sychov, Mayor of Melitopol (Ukraine),
March 2009.*

subject of a recommendation adopted in October 2009. This invites cities to draw as well on the "European Capitals of Culture" and "Agenda 21" concepts to add greater dynamism and value to their cultural activities, which can offer significant economic potential both for themselves and for the regions.

The new information technologies, which played a prominent part in the Congress' considerations, were the subject of several meetings. These



A Round table was organised, during the Congress Session in March 2009, with the mayors of municipalities taking part in the programme "Intercultural Cities".

culminated in the adoption of two resolutions, the first of which, in March, presented by the Committee on Social Cohesion, encourages local authorities to overcome the "digital divide" at local and regional level, i.e. to solve the problems relating to Internet access in some geographical areas, but also those of user training. The second, the outcome of work by the Committee on Culture and Education, relates to "e-democracy". Adopted in October 2009, it relates to the use of the Internet for political purposes and election campaigning – a useful tool for promoting public participation, but requiring "good practice" to which local and regional authorities of course have a great deal to contribute through both words and action.



Heinz Buschkowsky
(Germany)

Mayor of Berlin-Neukölln

“Employment and education are Berlin-Neukölln’s biggest challenges”

Neukölln has about 300.000 inhabitants consisting of more than 160 nations. What are the main challenges you are confronted with in such a multifaceted municipality?

Heinz Buschkowsky : The two biggest challenges are linked to the socio-economic situation. We have high unemployment rates – it is about 50 percent among migrants, the total average is about 24 percent – and a low educational state of parents. This prevents parents from actively supporting their children. Due to the high rate of unemployment we are facing the fact that about 75 percent of children in the northern part of Neukölln are depending on social welfare.

The “intercultural concept“ implies a dialogue between majorities and minority populations. How do you promote this idea?

Heinz Buschkowsky : The keyword in this respect is participation. This works in Neukölln through the instrument of “Neighbourhood Management”. Since 1999 eleven neighbourhood management areas have been created for city zones which are socially deprived. Approximately one third of the Neukölln population lives in such areas. Participation is structured around so called “neighbourhood committees”, each comprising about 50 citizens and local actors. During the last ten years about 500 people have been actively involved in this kind of local participation.

What do you expect from the “Intercultural Cities Programme“ which was launched by the European Union and the Council of Europe?

Heinz Buschkowsky : This project helps to raise awareness not only for the challenges and the problems but also for the examples of best practice. On that score, the media which look at Neukölln seriously have become an important partner for the City Council. They support our intention to impart the new intercultural policy approach with regard to regional and national governments as well as to the larger public.



The Congress pursues Euro-Mediterranean dialogue by participating in the organisation of the forthcoming Euro-Arab Cities Forum scheduled for 2011.

Euro-Mediterranean partnership must involve local communities

Congress ready to offer its expertise to engage the Mediterranean in concrete co-operation

The Congress, which has long been engaged in co-operation with local and regional authorities of the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, participates in the major initiatives undertaken since 2008 to strengthen Euro-Mediterranean dialogue which, to be successful, must involve local and regional government.

At its Plenary Session in March 2009, the Congress held a wide-ranging debate on local authorities' role

with regard to the dialogue between the two shores of the Mediterranean. As Ian Micallef, the acting President of the Congress, pointed out at the time, the local authorities of the southern Mediterranean countries are still fragile, in contrast to those on the northern shore, which is why the Congress has rallied round to assist them in their development and organisation. Whether it be with regard to the consolidation of democracy, to economic progress or to respect for human rights, it is important to work

with local authorities of these countries to help them play their role in these areas to the fullest extent. The Congress has been doing this for some time, an example being the case of Morocco which recently set up an association of local elected representatives along the lines of those existing in Europe, and the Congress is calling on Algeria to do likewise.

In 2009, the Congress decided to set up a specific working group on Euro-Mediterranean dialogue in order to draw up a clear strategy and guide its activities in the region. During the March debate, the Congress reviewed the existing initiatives in these areas in order to fine-tune its own position. In addition, at the end of 2008 it signed a partnership agreement with the Council of Europe's North-South Centre, once again in order to optimise its responses.

The launch of the Union for the Mediterranean in July 2008 shows the desire of all the Mediterranean countries to strengthen their dialogue and co-operation nearly fifteen years after the establishment of the Barcelona Process, which is still only a qualified success. For many local elected representatives, such as Etienne Butzbach, the mayor of Belfort (France), the Barcelona Process has in fact failed because of both its focus on government action and the fact that it is too strictly financially oriented, whereas - for "sustainable, solidarity-based and decentralised" development - it is essential to involve the local authorities in concrete co-operation programmes.

"ARLEM", a tool for Euro-Mediterranean dialogue at the local level

The initiative of the European Union's Committee of the Regions to set up the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) is a response to these decentralised co-operation objectives and will prompt local and regional authorities in the countries concerned to work together more closely. The Congress has expressed the wish to be given observer status in this new body, highlighting its contacts, experience and motivation to place local democracy on a sound footing in all the countries in which it is already engaged. For Luc van den Brande (Belgium), at the time President of the EU's Committee of the Regions, the Congress indeed possesses expertise that will be indispensable for the success of the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue at local

level. From 2010 onwards, the Congress will accordingly be developing concrete co-operation measures with ARLEM in the context of this new assembly.

Moreover, after co-organising the 3rd Euro-Arab Cities Forum, which was held in Dubai in 2008, the Congress set up a permanent platform for continuing this dialogue and will be involved in the organisation of the fourth edition of this event, which will be held in a European city in 2011.

However, there are also numerous other co-operation bodies on which certain Congress members sit, such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, whose

remit includes environmental and socio-economic issues. Similarly, in 2009 the Italian region of Liguria organised "days" aimed at strengthening cohesion between the western Mediterranean countries, while the Standing Committee for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership of Local and Regional Authorities (COPPEM) has initiated an extensive activities programme that involves the entire Mediterranean basin. The association of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) also has a Mediterranean Interregional Committee. Dialogue and co-operation between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean will foster peace and political stability

and enable concrete results to be obtained in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, as well as in dealing with immigration issues.

“ *Congress expertise is key to enhance Euro-Mediterranean dialogue.* ”

*Luc Van den Brande (Belgium),
President of the European Union
Committee of the Regions, March
2009.*

City diplomacy for Europe's security

In addition to co-operation initiatives involving collective bodies, the Congress encourages direct co-operation between towns and cities in the Mediterranean basin, especially those located in conflict zones. It has issued several calls on Israeli and Palestinian local authorities to resume dialogue, in the direct interests of their inhabitants, who want peace and tranquillity more than anything else. For example, in January 2009, the Bureau called on the Union of Local Authorities in Israel (ULAI) and the Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA), both enjoying observer status with the Congress, to commit themselves to undertaking efforts and initiatives and stepping up contacts and cooperation aimed at building an atmosphere which would allow for dialogue between their communities, and at strengthening local democracy necessary for the overall democratic development of the region. The Bureau also called on the Israeli and

Euro-Mediterranean partnership must involve local communities

Palestinian authorities to encourage and facilitate such efforts and initiatives at local level, also within the Palestinian communities in order to achieve inter-Palestinian reconciliation, a major component in bringing about peace. The mayor of Hebron, Khaled Osaily (Palestine), was invited by the Congress to attend its session in March 2009, and pointed out the importance for his city of the links it has established with a number of European towns and cities, while calling on Europe to help end the very difficult conditions imposed on his city by the fact that it is cut in two, with half of it under Israeli control.



Khaled Osaily, the mayor of Hebron, the main city in Palestine, addresses the Congress, in March 2009.

In other zones of conflict or tension, especially between the two Cypriot communities, the local authorities are learning to work together, thus fostering reconciliation. They are benefiting from the support of the European Union, the Congress and various international bodies. "What we have been able to achieve at the local level in the former Yugoslavia, we must be able to accomplish also in Cyprus", Ian Micallef, acting President of the Congress, emphasised, calling for local democracy agencies to be set up in the country.

This "city diplomacy", like co-operation between institutions, is part of the even broader framework of security of the Mediterranean basin: European local elected representatives point out that peace in the countries bordering its shores is crucial for peace throughout Europe and at world level. For Ian Micallef, local and regional authorities possess all the necessary tools to ensure the triumph of democracy in this region turning it into a "model of intercultural dialogue for the rest of the world".



Ian Micallef
(Malta)

Acting President of the Congress

“Congress know-how will sustain Euro-Mediterranean dialogue”

What can local elected representatives do to strengthen the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue?

Ian Micallef: We must settle European matters in the first place before we engage ourselves elsewhere. Cyprus and Turkey are both members of the Council of Europe and in Nicosia there are now local co-operation bodies proving that both parties are quite able to work together. We must also help Cyprus restore intercultural dialogue and we have tools for this purpose. For example, the Congress set up local democracy agencies to stabilise the former Yugoslavia and comparable structures are to be developed in Cyprus.

What place will the Congress have in the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly, ARLEM, launched by the EU Committee of the Regions?

Ian Micallef: ARLEM is a setting for encounter which serves all local elected representatives of the Mediterranean and in which the Congress participates as an observer. We have already helped the local authorities of several countries in the Maghreb and the Middle East, the first being Morocco as from 2000, to acquire more democratic structures. We have just set up a new working group to strengthen local democracy in these countries and more effectively determine our strategies with them.

The Mayor of Hebron, Khaled Osaily (Palestine), asked the Congress to support his town in its efforts to be placed on the UNESCO world heritage list. What response can you make to him?

Ian Micallef: Peace in Palestine remains the principal challenge of Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. We support Hebron's request because the listing would afford this historic town better protection. Apart from that, the Palestinians ask neither money nor resources of us, but the true political recognition that we owe them.



A Seminar on the European dimension of cross-border co-operation was organised on 19 June 2009 by the University of Strasbourg, in partnership with the Congress and the Euro-Institut of Kehl (Germany).

Transfrontier co-operation: a topical debate

Transcending borders, territorial authorities consolidate
cohesion of their communities

Through its Chamber of Regions in particular, the Congress carried out many activities highlighting the economic and political benefits of inter-regional and transfrontier co-operation. Bridging the urban-rural divide, improving territorial cohesion, strengthening cultural ties between communities and finding joint responses which transcend national boundaries are that many examples of the advantages of such co-operation. 2009 therefore saw further work on projects already launched in this area in previous years such as the Adriatic and Black Sea Euroregions.

Transfrontier co-operation now takes on various forms, which are tailored to the different situations of the authorities involved. As a tool for territorial cohesion, it also plays a part in promoting European values relating to diversity and culture. The socio-cultural dimensions of transfrontier co-operation and its application in the field of cultural tourism and the recognition of the cultures of minority groups were discussed at various conferences throughout Europe in 2009 at which the Congress made its voice heard and set out its values.

“Diversity must be a living experience in order for it to become an asset rather than a negative concept. It requires mobility in getting to know new cultures and new geographical areas”, underlined Karl-Heinz Lambertz, the Belgian Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education and the Working Group on Inter-Regional Co-operation, in Eupen (Belgium) in February 2009. He was speaking at a seminar on promoting transfrontier cultural tourism as a means of bringing people closer together. According to him, cultural tourism was part and parcel of cross-border co-operation. “It is a growth area, and is especially important in border regions where different cultures, languages and administrative structures live side by side every day”, he added.

In addition, two conferences, in Strasbourg (France) and Maastricht (Netherlands), looked in depth at the practical aspects of cross-border co-operation and good governance in this area.

A vector for economic and social cohesion

The seminar on the European dimension of cross-border co-operation held in June 2009 by the University of Strasbourg (France), in partnership with the Congress and the Euro Institute of Kehl (Germany), analysed the respective contributions of the European Union and the Council of Europe to local and regional co-operation in Europe. According to Ulrich Bohner, then Secretary General of the Congress, this co-operation was now playing an increasingly important role in achieving greater economic and social cohesion in Europe. "Settling problems in border regions through cross-border co-operation is most easily implemented at local and regional level, which has the added value of policies being devised in close proximity to citizens and other local actors", he explained. In his view, cross-border co-operation encouraged participation by citizens in the implementation of projects which would meet their needs, and could also be a tool for intercultural learning.

At the conference on practical approaches towards effective European transfrontier co-operation in Maastricht in July 2009, the Congress considered the factors which facilitate or hinder such co-operation at European level. "Co-operation between communities across national borders has been rising in importance hand in hand with the growing decentralisation of powers towards territorial level, and the advancing European integration at all levels of governance", stressed Ian Micallef, acting President of the Congress. He pointed out that cross-border co-operation had become an indispensable tool for bridging the urban-rural divide and development gaps between communities, and thereby raising the quality of local and regional governance as a whole. The outcomes of the conference provided input for discussion of the subject at the Conference of Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government in Utrecht in November 2009.

A further debate held in Brdo (Slovenia) in June highlighted all the benefits which local authorities in south-eastern Europe had derived from transfrontier co-operation. Slovenia, which was chairing the Committee of Ministers at the time, also underlined the advantages of such co-operation with the Croatian, Austrian and Italian regions on its borders. The Congress was a driving force in the success of these cross-border programmes. Given its experience, it was therefore particularly well placed to develop similar co-operation models at local and regional level in the Caucasus region, according to many local and regional elected representatives from that part of Europe.

In October, the Congress adopted a resolution and a recommendation calling on states to give transfrontier co-operation greater support, in particular by ratifying the new protocol to the Madrid Convention on the subject, which makes provision for the establishment of Euroregional Co-operation Groupings. It calls on European regions to set up bi- or trilateral agreements and arrangements, which will increase the stability of the regions concerned, while enabling them to work together in specific areas such as health and the environment.

Moving towards new types of co-operation

2009 also saw the development of new structures of transfrontier co-operation, such as the Adriatic Eurodistrict. In March, Marija Katovic, Mayor of Kotor (Montenegro), presented the South Adriatic Eurodistrict to Congress members.

This recently established entity, which was made up of 17 local authorities in Montenegro, Albania and Italy, was based on an agreement which governed how it was organised and operated.

During the same debate, Jean-Paul Heider (France), Vice-President of the Association of European Border Regions, presented the Tri-national Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine, encompassing the French, German and Swiss regions between the Jura, the Vosges, the Black Forest and the Palatinate Forest. Based on four pillars (political, economic, scientific and civil society), the region had launched its first projects in 2009.

During the October session, Roland Ries, mayor of Strasbourg (France), the Council of Europe's host city, presented the work done to implement the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict, which includes French and German municipalities. "The concept of transfrontier co-operation is now fully integrated into our local governance. Soon the Eurodistrict will move even further along the path of integration, going beyond the simple concept of co-operation and drawing closer to that of joint decision-making", he declared.

Regions are, of course, best equipped for conducting co-operation programmes of their own initiative, but they are also involved in developing new arrangements such as the "territories of co-responsibility" launched in September on the initiative of the city of Mulhouse (France). At the same time, the Congress believes that carrying on with tried-and-tested approaches such as town twinning is one of the best

“ *The establishment of the Euro-Caucasus entity for co-operation between municipalities across the Armenian-Georgian border is a good implementation of Congress standards on transfrontier co-operation.* ”

Ludmila Sfirloaga (Romania), President of the Congress Chamber of Regions, June 2009.

means of winning public support for European ideals. It made this clear at the International Twinning Conference held in Izmir (Turkey) at the end of October.

To encourage debate about all new types of transfrontier co-operation, the Congress took part in November in the Conference of Regions with Legislative Powers. In addition, at the October session, the Congress adopted a recommendation and a resolution on regions with legislative powers. These texts, while inviting governments to continue to strengthen existing levels of regional governance or to establish it where none exists, also address the question of how to best represent these regions in light of the varied bodies of the Council of Europe. In addition the texts are also concerned with the representation in these regions in the second chambers of national parliaments and special self-governing status for regions in Europe

Euroregional structures

The Congress monitored developments, on the ground, in the Euroregions of the Black Sea and the Adriatic set up under its direction. It took stock of the new schemes they had initiated, in particular for the Black Sea in the areas of culture and tourism. The Congress has also given its support to several new regional and transfrontier co-operation entities such as the Danube Council, which brings together the towns and regions along the river, and the Euro-Caucasus entity designed to establish closer ties between municipalities on the Armenian-Georgian border.

At the March 2009 session, the Congress held a debate on the development of the Black Sea Euroregion. Several specific Black Sea Euroregion projects were presented, including the "Black Sea Cruise" project, geared towards developing tourism and socio-cultural infrastructure in the Black Sea Basin. This involves, among other things, developing tourism services with the opening of a ferry between Romania and Bulgaria (Constanta-Varna-Burgas), which could be extended to Odessa and Istanbul.

During the debate, it was also proposed that a network of associations of Black Sea local authorities be set up, along the lines of the NALAS network for South-East Europe.



Zlata Plostajner

(Slovenia)

*Minister for Local Self-Government
and Regional Development of
Slovenia*

“It is our objective
to form the best
opportunities possible
to ensure a quality
way of life in
the bordering
areas”

What advantages can transfrontier co-operation bring to local authorities, in particular in Slovenia?

Zlata Plostajner : Slovenia has been an active member of the Council of Europe for several years, especially in the field of cross-border and transfrontier co-operation in the South-Eastern Europe. Slovenia has adopted several international agreements with the countries of South-Eastern Europe. Slovenia is also an active member of the Framework Agreement of the Sava river Basin and co-founder of the Alps-Adriatic Working Group. Since 1994, we have prepared and implemented numerous projects in the field of transport and border-area infrastructure, environment, tourism and agriculture with the neighbouring countries of Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia. It is our objective to form the best opportunities possible to ensure a quality way of life in the bordering areas.

In your view, how can the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and its initiatives contribute to the development of transfrontier co-operation in South-East Europe?

Zlata Plostajner : In the last decades, the role of the Council of Europe and thus also the role of the Congress in building the system of local self-government in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe has been very important. The monitoring system of local self-government set up by the Congress is an important guide for each member state for further activities in their countries. Cross-border and transfrontier co-operation of local and regional authorities needs to be strengthened and promoted as it promotes and realises the basic objectives of the Council of Europe. I would also like to underline the importance of the Council of Europe in the field of local and regional democracy where, for several years now, a broad discussion on the documents on regional self-government has been underway.



Acting Congress President Ian Micallef (right) and President of the EU Committee of the Regions Luc Van den Brande sign the new co-operation agreement, in Brussels, on 12 November 2009.

A network of strategic partnerships for the Congress

Congress signs a new agreement with the EU Committee of the Regions

The Congress continued its traditional co-operation with the international bodies representing local and regional governments and with national associations of local and regional authorities. To improve synergy with the European Union, the Congress revised its co-operation agreement with the Committee of the Regions. Within the Council of Europe, it also stepped up dialogue with the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly. Lastly, the Congress continued to offer support to the networks which it helped to set up and organise, in particular the ENTO training network, the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) and the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA).

In 2009, the Congress continued its co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly and took part in the discussions of its committees, enabling the two bodies to agree common positions for the Conference of Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government held in Utrecht (Netherlands) in November. In their capacity as bodies involved in the observation of elections, the Congress and the Assembly also continued to take part in the discussions of the Council for Democratic Elections within the Council of Europe Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission).

In addition, the Congress and the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR), as joint founders of the European Local Democracy Week

(ELDW), ensured that the joint event went smoothly in 2009 and co-ordinated the drafting of various texts concerning local and regional democracy, in particular the reference framework for regional democracy. From 2010 on, co-ordination of ELDW, which was previously shared with the CDLR, will be performed entirely by the Congress.

Dialogue with governments

In order to establish greater synergy with national governments, the Congress presented its position and contributed to the discussions at the conferences of ministers responsible for social cohesion, in Moscow (Russia) in February 2009; media and new communication services, in Reykjavik (Iceland) in May; as well as family affairs in Vienna (Austria) and justice in Tromso (Norway), both in June.

“Local and regional government is not in competition with national authorities – they are complementary,” said the acting President of the Congress, Ian Micallef, during an exchange of views with the Committee of Ministers in Strasbourg in September. He emphasised the complementary nature of the action by the two bodies to promote the Council of Europe’s fundamental objectives, in particular in terms of monitoring local and regional democracy. While underlining the need for enhanced co-operation, Ian Micallef proposed that a platform for informal dialogue between the Committee of Ministers and the Congress be set up.

Moreover, a protocol of intent was signed in May with a view to the preparation of a co-operation agreement with the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The Congress also continued work on the preparation of co-operation agreements with the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE), the Conference of European Regions with Legislative Power (REGLEG) and the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR).

A new agreement with the Committee of the Regions

At their bipartite annual meeting in Brussels in November, Ian Micallef and Luc Van den Brande (Belgium), President of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union, signed the revised co-operation agreement between the two institutions. Under the new agreement, the Presidents of the Congress and the Committee of the Regions, assisted by the Secretaries

General, will now be responsible for defining policy orientation and setting co-operation priorities. The Committee of the Regions/Congress Contact Group will draw up a work programme for the implementation of these priorities by the respective committees, commissions and working groups and will be able to add other specific activities.

The revised agreement also reiterates the principle of complementarity between the Congress and the Committee of the Regions, as well as respect for each institution’s responsibilities and nature. It provides that the choice of leading institution in joint projects will be based on their specific functions and experience.

“One of the keys to successful European integration is networking, and this new agreement further consolidates one such institutional network and partnership between the Congress and the Committee of the Regions,” said Ian Micallef at the meeting. According to him, the two institutions share the common goal of advancing local and regional democracy and improving governance of our communities, and have great potential for creating synergies in pursuing these common objectives.

“ *The new agreement consolidates the partnership between the Congress and the Committee of the Regions.* ”

Ian Micallef (Malta), acting President of the Congress, November 2009.

Co-operation networks

The Congress took a close interest in the activities of the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS), which mainly concerned decentralisation in this region and the impact of the economic crisis on local authorities. In December, it contributed to the fifth General Assembly of NALAS in Istanbul (Turkey), which focused on the

role of local authorities in South-East Europe in the EU integration process, the means of involving them in the process and the challenges they are facing.

The Congress also took part in the events held by the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA), of which it was one of the founders, and, at the ceremony marking the association’s 10th anniversary in Brussels in May, reiterated its desire to step up its interaction and partnerships with the agencies in the association.

The European Network of Training Organisations for Local and Regional Authorities (ENTO) held two major meetings in Strasbourg, at which it revised its statute and activity programmes. The Congress hopes that ENTO’s new working methods will also help to strengthen ties and co-operation between the two bodies. It underlined the added value which the ENTO network’s expertise brings to the Congress’ action and highlighted their role as partners in consolidating democracy in Europe.

Appendix 1

Texts adopted by the Congress in 2009

Recommendations

Recommendation 259

Public water and sewer services for sustainable development

Recommendation 260

Combating domestic violence against women

Recommendation 261

Intercultural cities

Recommendation 262

Equality and diversity in local authority employment and service provision

Recommendation 263

The digital divide and e-inclusion in the regions

Recommendation 264

Observation of the elections to the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara (Georgia) (3 November 2008)

Recommendation 265

Good governance: a key factor for the sustainable economic development of regions

Recommendation 266

The future of cultural tourism – towards a sustainable model

Recommendation 267

Congress resources and its 2010 budget

Recommendation 268

New budgetary perspectives

Recommendation 269

Local elections in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (22 March 2009)

Recommendation 270

Transfrontier co-operation in Europe

Recommendation 271

The global challenge of climate change: Local responses

Recommendation 272

Preventing violence against children

Recommendation 273

Equal access to local and regional elections

Recommendation 274

E-democracy: opportunities and risks for local authorities

Recommendation 275

Creative cities – managing the cultural activity of cities

Recommendation 276

Improving indoor air quality: a new challenge for local authorities

Recommendation 277

First municipal elections of Yerevan (Armenia) (31 May 2009)

Recommendation 278

Regions with legislative powers: towards multi-level governance

Recommendation 279

Overindebtedness of households: the responsibility of region

Resolutions

Resolution 277

Verification of new members' credentials and new appointment procedures

Resolution 278

Public water and sewer services for sustainable development

Resolution 279

Combating domestic violence against women

Resolution 280

Intercultural cities

Resolution 281

Equality and diversity in local authority employment and service provision

Resolution 282

The digital divide and e-inclusion in the regions

Resolution 283

Good governance: a key factor for the sustainable economic development of regions

Resolution 284

The future of cultural tourism – towards a sustainable model

Resolution 285

Verification of new members' credentials and new appointment procedures

Resolution 286

Transfrontier co-operation in Europe

Resolution 287

Declaration on the 60th Anniversary of the Council of Europe

Resolution 288

The global challenge of climate change: Local responses

Resolution 289

Preventing violence against children

Resolution 290

E-democracy: opportunities and risks for local authorities

Resolution 291

Creative cities – managing the cultural activity of cities

Resolution 292

Improving indoor air quality: a new challenge for local authorities

Resolution 293

Regions with legislative powers: towards multi-level governance

Resolution 294

Overindebtedness of households: the responsibility of regions

Opinions

Opinion 30

Opinion - Draft Protocol N°3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings

Opinion 31

Code of good practice for civil participation in the decision-making process

Appendix 2

Calendar

2009 Calendar for the Congress sessions and meetings of the Bureau, Statutory Committees, Standing Committees and Working Groups

January

Monitoring visit to Turkey
12-14 January

Bureau of the Congress and its Chambers
20 January

February

Seminar on cross border cultural tourism in Europe
18 February

GT/CIR - Working Group on Inter-Regional Co-operation
19 February

NALAS and Task Force on Association Development
19 February

March

Culture and Education Committee
2 March

Sustainable Development Committee
2 March

Bureau of the Congress and its Chambers
2 March

Bureau of the Congress and its Chambers
4 March

Institutional Committee
4 March

Social Cohesion Committee
4 March

16th Plenary Session
3-5 March

Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government
27 March

Appendix 2

April

Committee on Social Cohesion
28-29 April

May

Pre-electoral mission to Yerevan (Armenia)
4-5 May

GT/LEG - Working Group
'Regions with legislative powers'
6 May

Bureau of the Congress and its Chambers
7 May

Institutional Committee
15 May

Monitoring visit to Switzerland
25-27 May

Observation of municipal elections in Yerevan (Armenia)
31 May - 1 June

June

Bureau of the Congress and its Chambers
9 June

Standing Committee
10 June

Monitoring visit to Iceland
15-17 June

July

Bureau of the Congress
7 July

September

GT/CIR - Working Group on Inter-Regional Co-operation
2 September

Visit by the acting President of the Congress to Azerbaijan
10-14 September

Culture and Education Committee
18 September

Hearing on "Diverse cities, creative cities"
19 September

Bureau of the Congress and its Chambers
21 September

Group of Independent Experts on the
European Charter of Local Self-Government
29-30 September

October

Bureau of the Congress and its Chambers
12 -14- 15 October

Institutional Committee
12 October

Social Cohesion Committee
12 October

LR-IC - Committee of Experts on local and regional
government institutions and co-operation
12 October

17th Plenary Session
13 -15 October

Sustainable Development Committee
14 October

Culture and Education Committee
15 October

November

Visit by the acting President of the Congress to Albania
2 November

GT/LEG - Working Group 'Regions with legislative powers'
6 November

Meeting of Directors/Presidents of ENTO member institutions
9 November

December

Sustainable Development Committee
1 December

Pre-electoral mission to Azerbaijan
7-8 December

Monitoring visit to Belgium
16-18 December

Monitoring visit to the Russian Federation
16-17 December

Observation of local elections in Azerbaijan
20-24 December

Missions of the acting President of the Congress in 2009

5-6 March, Prague (Czech Republic)

Summit of the Regions and Cities of
the Committee of the Regions

22-24 April, Malmö (Sweden)

General Assembly, CEMR, Municipalities
and Regions of Europe

12 May Madrid (Spain)

119th session of Committee of Ministers

14 May, St Petersburg (Russia)

32nd Plenary Session, CIS Interparliamentary Assembly

15 May, St Petersburg (Russia)

International Ecological Congress

26-27 May, Brussels (Belgium)

ALDA General Assembly and 10th Anniversary

29-30 June, Stuttgart (Germany)

Annual Conference on Cities for Children

6 July, Maastricht (The Netherlands)

Conference on practical approaches towards
effective transfrontier co-operation

9 September, Strasbourg (France)

1064 meeting of Committee of Ministers

10-14 September, Baku (Azerbaijan)

Official Visit

18 September, Paris (France)

Contact Group "Congress/Committee of the Regions"

1-2 November, Tirana (Albania)

Official Visit

12 November, Brussels (Belgium)

Signature of the revised co-operation agreement between
the Congress and the EU Committee of the Regions

16-17 November, Utrecht (The Netherlands)

Ministerial Conference for local and regional authorities

Observation of local and regional elections in 2009

« The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia »

22 March 2009

Local elections

Yerevan (Armenia)

4-5 May 2009

Pre-electoral visit

Yerevan (Armenia)

31 May 2009

Municipal elections

Azerbaijan

7-8 December 2009

Pre-electoral visit

Azerbaijan

23 December 2009

Municipal elections

THE STATE OF THE CONGRESS 2009

The **Congress**



COUNCIL
OF EUROPE

CONSEIL
DE L'EUROPE

Le **Congrès**

COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex · Tel: +33 (0)3 88 41 21 10 · congress.web@coe.int · www.coe.int/congress