

# The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



02/05/2011

## **Information note for the members of the Bureau and the Standing Committee on Institutional Affairs of the Assembly of European Regions (AER) in their meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April 2011, s'Hertogenbosch (NL)**

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of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Item VI. Update on current activities – Council of Europe Congress activities and co-operation with AER

*Information document*



The co-operation between the AER and the Congress is very fruitful and targeted on common priorities. The Congress is very grateful to the AER's support clarifying misleading and wrong information about the Congress and a proposal by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to discontinue financing the travel expenses of the members of the Congress earlier this year.

#### **Latest developments in the Council of Europe**

- In the current process of reform of the Council of Europe member states in the Committee of Ministers on 19 April 2011 approved a new approach of a bi-annual programme of activities and budget for 2012-2013 based on priorities which will be reviewed after two years.
- The CoE will refocus its activities on human rights, democracy and the rule of law along 6 priority axes
  - Protection and promotion of human rights
  - Challenges to the rule of law
  - Development of pan-European common standards and policies
  - Justice
  - Democratic governance
  - Sustainable democratic societies
- The intergovernmental work will be streamlined and the existing committees and sub-structures will be reduced from 51 to 26.  
Relevant for AER: CDLR (AER has observer status and contributes actively) will continue to exist with a new mandate (presently under definition) but without the current three subcommittees.

#### **The reform of the Congress**

- The Congress has started its reform process in 2008 and adopted new structures, improved working methods and amendments to its rules of procedures in 2010. This is currently being implemented. The Congress is fully involved in the reform process of the Council of Europe and actively contributes to it.
- Three Committees replace the former 4 Committees and focus on institutional matters and the Congress'and the CoE's core business:
  - Monitoring: Monitoring the Charter of Local Self Government (ECLSG) and promoting the Reference Framework for regional democracy, as encouraged by the Committee of Ministers on 19 April 2011.
  - Governance: Cooperation with the intergovernmental sector, inter-regional and cross-border co-operation, perspectives and challenges for democracy, public finance etc.
  - Current Affairs: to react swiftly to challenges faced by local and regional authorities like migration, integration, minorities, social cohesion, Roma, culture, education, sustainable development and other policy fields identified by the Ministerial Conference of Utrecht 2009.
- New Statutory Forum:  
In June 2011 a new body, replacing the former Standing Committee, will take up its duties: The Statutory Forum. Composed of the
  - members of the Bureau,
  - the chairpersons of the 47 national delegations,
  - and with a consultative role of the chairpersons of the three Committees and of the chairpersons of the three political groupsit ensures wide representativity and shall act on behalf of the Congress outside Sessions, when needed. The heads of delegations have an important role of coordination and liaising with national ministries, with their respective delegations in the Parliamentary Assembly but also with the leading representatives of their regions and local authorities in the AER, CEMR, AEBR and the Committee of the Regions, where applicable. This shall - at national level - contribute to a better implementation of the decisions taken in Strasbourg and to develop common positions in favour of regions and local authorities for example in the regular conferences of ministers responsible for local and regional government of the Council of Europe.

A list of the heads of national delegations to the Congress is available in the AER secretariat.

#### **Areas of co-operation with AER in the Congress work programme (selection)**

- Support for regions and local authorities in Arab countries of the Mediterranean in establishing democratic structures on the basis of the CoE neighbourhood policy including all relevant CoE structures

- Monitoring the ECLSG and follow up e.g. by contributing to action plans for member states developed by Council of Europe bodies
- Establishing a common legal space in Europe for local democracy: campaign with member states to lift reservations of contracting parties to articles of the ECLSG
- Promoting the reference framework on regional democracy
- Observation of local and regional elections and follow up → possibility for representatives of national associations of local and regional authorities who are not Congress members to participate in Congress delegations at their expense!
- Preparation of the Kiev conference and the agenda for local and regional democracy of the Council of Europe for the years 2012 – 2014. Congress proposals concern the status of political representatives, threats against politicians, public ethics and fighting corruption, improving citizen participation in local and regional political life including elections etc.
- Contribution to the programmes of the incoming presidencies of the Council of Europe: Ukraine (May – November 2011), United Kingdom, Albania followed by Andorra, Armenia and Austria (until May 2014) → raising issues of importance also at national level, co-organizing events, promoting common themes of Congress and AER, CEMR etc.
- Participation of regional representatives in national delegations to the Council of Europe → presently practised in the CDLR only by Austria, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland; this should be enhanced and complemented by domestic participation schemes, where inclusion of regional representatives in national delegations is not easy to establish at short term.
- Fighting corruption at local and regional level
- Support of the establishment of the new Eastern Partnership Conference of local and regional authorities of the EU in co-operation with the CoR
- Roma
- Support of each other's activities e.g. in the Black Sea area as practiced in a conference in April 2011 → to be continued!

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## **Democracy**

Congress and AER can complement each others activities while avoiding duplication by increasing contact of their members at national levels in addition to the good co-operation at the level of the presidents of the AER with the presidents of the Congress and of the Chamber of Regions and the Secretariats.

Please consult the Congress website for more information.

- Priorities 2011-2012 and mandates of the new committees:  
[http://www.coe.int/t/congress/Fonctionnement/statutory-committees/default\\_en.asp?mytabsmenu=](http://www.coe.int/t/congress/Fonctionnement/statutory-committees/default_en.asp?mytabsmenu=)
- Guidelines for the observation of local and regional elections  
[http://www.coe.int/t/congress/activities/observation/default\\_EN.asp?mytabsmenu=3](http://www.coe.int/t/congress/activities/observation/default_EN.asp?mytabsmenu=3)
- Guidelines for monitoring the European Charter of Local Self-government  
[http://www.coe.int/t/congress/Activities/Monitoring/default\\_en.asp?mytabsmenu=3](http://www.coe.int/t/congress/Activities/Monitoring/default_en.asp?mytabsmenu=3)
- Congress activity report 2009:  
[http://www.coe.int/t/congress/Publications/Activity-Report\\_en.asp?mytabsmenu=8](http://www.coe.int/t/congress/Publications/Activity-Report_en.asp?mytabsmenu=8)
- Thrombinoscope and who is who:  
[http://www.coe.int/t/congress/whoswho/default\\_en.asp?](http://www.coe.int/t/congress/whoswho/default_en.asp?)
- General information about the Congress:  
[http://www.coe.int/t/congress/presentation/default\\_en.asp?mytabsmenu=1](http://www.coe.int/t/congress/presentation/default_en.asp?mytabsmenu=1)

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