

Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life



Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
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The Congress



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Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

| French edition:

| *Charte européenne révisée sur la participation*
| *des jeunes à la vie locale et régionale*

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Introduction

"The active participation of young people in decisions and actions at local and regional level is essential if we are to build more democratic, inclusive and prosperous societies. Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society." *Preamble of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*

The preamble of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life makes it clear that effective youth participation is essential to a healthy, democratic society. It is particularly relevant given the context of declining engagement of young people with traditional political processes which has been observed over recent years. It is only when government policies – be they at national, regional or local level – reflect young people's realities, that young people's interest in politics will be revived.

Already in 1992, the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, forerunner to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, realised that youth participation requires a commitment from local and regional authorities to build a culture where young people are able to contribute in valuable and meaningful ways. The Standing Conference's commitment was translated into the European

Charter on the Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life which was the result of discussions between young people and local and regional elected representatives.

The Charter was revised in 2003 at the request of the young participants in a conference on “Young people – actors in their towns and regions”, organised by the Congress in Cracow (Poland) in March 2002 to mark the Charter’s 10th anniversary.

The legitimacy of democratic institutions can be called into question because of the distance between the places where decisions are taken and the people affected by them. Local and regional authorities have the advantage of being closest to citizens and thus, by entering into a genuine dialogue and partnership with the people living in their territories, their policies can be truly democratic, relevant and effective because they are based on citizens’ needs. Young people are citizens of the towns and regions in which they live and if a culture of youth participation is to be developed, it is at these levels that it can take root and grow.

Young people have the right to be involved in the democratic structures and processes of our societies. They have the right to have their voice heard and to make their own decisions on issues that will impact on them and their lives. However, that requires that young people be recognised not as a problem to be dealt with but as actors in society, with their own rights and responsibilities. Their diversity of experience, background, ideas, skills and talent can be a unique resource for communities and for society.

Authorities must engage with young people on an equal basis, avoiding hierarchical relationships which put youth in an inferior position. Young people must not be treated

as victims, as a vulnerable group that needs protection, nor as objects of adults' intervention, with the adults assuming they know what is best for young people. This is the approach adopted by the Revised Charter which advocates adequate support and commitment to the implementation of youth participation policies and practices. Only in this way can authorities avoid the risk of engaging young people in tokenistic ways.

The Revised Charter is divided into 3 parts on: sectoral policies; instruments for youth participation; and institutional participation by young people in local and regional affairs.

In Part I, the Revised Charter contains a review of different policy areas – such as health, urban environment, education, etc. – and suggests a number of concrete measures that can provide the necessary support for young people's involvement in their communities.

Part II explores ideas and tools that can be used by local and regional authorities to enhance youth participation such as training, information services, information and communication technologies, youth organisations, etc.

Part III concentrates on institutional participation and the sort of structures and support that should be established in order to involve young people in processes where they can identify their needs, explore solutions, make decisions that affect them, and where they can plan actions with local and regional authorities on an equal footing. These may include youth councils, youth parliaments or youth forums which, for example, should be permanent structures composed of elected or appointed representatives, should give young people direct responsibility for projects and influencing policies, and so on.

Youth participation takes many different forms, from voluntary work to being active in organisations, from participation in non-formal education to campaigning activities. The Congress' Revised Charter specifically aims to promote youth participation at local and regional levels by providing concrete ideas and instruments. It is not a sort of recipe, which must be followed step by step, on how to achieve effective youth participation as the situation will vary from one country to another – indeed, situations will be different from one community to another. The Revised Charter should therefore be seen as a set of principles, best practices and guidelines to enhance youth participation at local and regional levels. Although the Revised Charter is not a legally binding instrument, the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted a recommendation supporting its implementation, which means that the member states have a moral responsibility to implement it, even though they are not legally bound to do so.

The co-management system used in the Council of Europe's Youth Sector, where young people and government representatives sit down around the same table to take together decisions that are grounded in the reality of young people, is a model of participation which should be emulated in all local and regional councils. The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life is an instrument that promotes co-management and, if used extensively across Europe, will enable young people to contribute to the construction of inclusive and prosperous societies, exercise their right to democratic citizenship and realise their full potential as active citizens of society.

Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

Charter without the status of a convention

adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (10th session – 21 May 2003 – Appendix to Recommendation 128)

Introduction

The foundation for what was to become the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life was laid at the first and second conference on youth policies, organised by the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, in Lausanne (June 1988) and in Llangollen (September 1991) respectively. Soon after, in March 1992, the Standing Conference adopted Resolution 237 and Article 22 thereof on the adoption of the Charter.

To celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, in partnership with the Council of Europe's Directorate for Youth and Sport, organised a conference entitled "Young People – Actors in their Towns and Regions". The general purpose of the conference held in Krakow on 7 and 8 March 2002 was to evaluate the progress

made in the field of youth participation during the Charter's ten years of existence, while discussing ways of further promoting youth participation, amongst others by disseminating good practices. The participants at the conference adopted the Krakow Declaration in which they reaffirm that young people are citizens in the municipalities and regions where they live, in the same way as any other age group, and must therefore have access to all forms of participation in society and that reaffirming and promoting the role of young people in the development of a democratic society, in particular in local and regional public life, was endorsed and re-established. Moreover, the conference constituted a contribution to the Council of Europe Integrated Project "Making Democratic Institutions Work".

The participants furthermore called for a response to new challenges faced by young people in contemporary society. Consequently they requested the CLRAE and the Advisory Council on Youth Questions of the Council of Europe to appoint experts to prepare proposals for amending the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life in order also to make it respond to new challenges of the twenty-first century such as the information society and urban insecurity.

The working meetings were convened at the end of 2002 and the beginning of 2003. The deliberations of these working meetings provide the basis of the present version of the Charter. This version of the Charter is divided into three sections. The first provides local and regional authorities with guidelines for how to conduct policies affecting young people in a number of areas. The second part provides the tools for

furthering the participation of young people. Finally, the third section provides advice on how to provide institutional conditions for participation of young people.

Preamble

The active participation of young people in decisions and actions at local and regional level is essential if we are to build more democratic, inclusive and prosperous societies. Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.

Local and regional authorities, as the authorities closest to the young person, have a very important role to play in promoting youth participation. In doing so, local and regional authorities can ensure that young people not only hear and learn about democracy and citizenship, but rather have the opportunity to practice it. However, youth participation is not solely about developing active citizens or building democracy for the future. It is vital, if participation is to be meaningful for young people, that they can influence and shape decisions and actions when they are young and not only at some later stage in life.

When local and regional authorities support and promote youth participation they also contribute to the social integration of young people, helping them to deal not only with the challenges and pressures of youth, but also with

the challenges of a modern society where anonymity and individualism are often predominant. However, for youth participation in local and regional life to be successful, lasting and meaningful requires more than the development or restructuring of political or administrative systems. Any policy or action designed to promote youth participation must ensure that the cultural environment is one of respect for young people and must also take into account the diverse needs, circumstances and aspirations of young people. And it must involve some element of fun and enjoyment.

Principles

1. The participation of young people in local and regional life must constitute part of a global policy of citizens' participation in public life, as set out in Recommendation Rec(2001)19 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the participation of citizens in local public life.
2. Local and regional authorities are convinced that all sectoral policies should have a youth dimension. They therefore undertake to comply with the provisions of this charter and to implement the various forms of participation, which follow in consultation and co-operation with young people and their representatives.
3. The principles and various forms of participation advocated in this charter apply to all young people without discrimination. In order to achieve this, special attention should be paid to promoting the participation in local and regional life of young people from disadvantaged sectors of society and from ethnic, national, social, sexual, cultural, religious and linguistic minorities.

Part I: Sectoral policies

1.1. A policy for sport, leisure and associative life

4. Local and regional authorities should support organised socio-cultural activities – run by youth associations and organisations, youth groups and community centres – which, together with the family and school or work, are one of the pillars of social cohesion in the municipality or region; these are an ideal channel for youth participation and the implementation of youth policies in the fields of sport, culture, crafts and trades, artistic and other forms of creation and expression, as well as in the field of social action.
5. In order to develop the local and regional youth association sector, local and regional authorities should through appropriate measures lend their support, in particular to organisations which train facilitators and leaders of youth clubs and organisations, as well as youth workers, who play a vital part in life at local and regional level.
6. Local and regional authorities should encourage associations to promote the active participation of young people in their statutory bodies.

1.2. A policy to promote youth employment and combat unemployment

7. The economic and social conditions that young people experience impact upon their willingness and ability to participate in their local community. When young people are unemployed or living in poverty they are less likely to have the desire, resources and social support to be active citizens in local and regional life. Young people who are unemployed are likely to be among the most excluded in society and therefore

local and regional authorities should develop policies and promote initiatives to reduce youth unemployment.

8. Therefore, local and regional authorities should:

- i. develop policies and programmes in concertation with young people (including those who are unemployed or at risk of being unemployed), local employers, trade unions, education, training and employment authorities and youth organisations to address the causes of youth unemployment and promote employment opportunities for young people;
- ii. establish local employment centres to provide specialist help and support to young unemployed people in finding meaningful and stable work. Young unemployed people should have the right to be involved in the management of these centres if they so wish;
- iii. support the establishment of businesses, enterprises and co-operatives by young people or groups of young people by providing funding and other support such as premises, equipment, training and professional advice;
- iv. encourage experimentation by young people with the social economy, community self-help initiatives or co-operatives.

1.3. Urban environment and habitat, housing policy, and transport

9. Together with representatives of youth organisations, local and regional authorities should create conditions for developing an urban environment policy based on a more integrated, less fragmented living environment which is

conducive to social interaction and the development of high-quality public spaces.

10. Local and regional authorities should pursue housing and urban environment policies which closely involve young people in consultation arrangements bringing together locally or regionally elected representatives, economic decision makers, leaders of associations and architects. Their aim is:

- i. to draw up programmes for a more harmonious environment conducive to personal self-fulfilment and the development of real solidarity between the generations;
- ii. to develop a concerted policy on the urban environment that takes account of residents' social and intercultural realities in the drawing up of housing and/or housing renovation programmes.

11. In close co-operation with youth organisations, tenants' organisations and/or consumer organisations, social housing agencies and social workers, local and regional authorities should promote the development of, or develop within existing social structures:

- i. local information services on housing for young people;
- ii. local schemes (e.g. low-cost loans, rent guarantee systems) to help young people gain access to housing.

12. The mobility of young people is made possible through easy access to public transport, of which they are the main users. This mobility is indispensable for participation in social life and for being full citizens.

13. Young people should therefore be involved in the organisation of public transport, at both local and regional level. Specially adapted rates should allow the most disadvantaged young people to travel.

14. In rural areas, mobility and transport are a fundamental necessity for quality of life and not just necessary to facilitate participation. Therefore, local and regional authorities should support rural transport initiatives that seek to provide transport services (public or private, individual or collective) and increase mobility in rural areas for groups such as young people who are currently excluded due to lack of means of transport.

1.4. An education and training policy promoting youth participation

15. School is an institution in which young people not only spend a considerable proportion of their lives and where they undertake a formal educational programme; it is also a place where many of their views and perspectives on life are shaped. It is essential that young people learn about participation and democracy while in school and that courses on democracy, participation and citizenship are available and properly resourced. However school must also be a place where young people experience democracy in action and where their participation in decision making is supported, promoted and is seen as effective. Therefore:

- i. local and regional authorities should actively encourage the participation of young people in school life. They should provide financial and other supports such as meeting facilities to enable young people to establish democratic school student associations. These associations should be independent and self-governing, and if they want to, they should have the right to participate in decisions concerning the management of the school in partnership with the teachers and school authorities.

- ii. where local and regional authorities are responsible for school curricula, they should ensure that students and student associations are consulted on an ongoing basis concerning curricula and their development. They should also ensure that civic and political education is incorporated into school curricula and given the necessary prominence and resources in the educational programme of all students.

1.5. A policy for mobility and exchanges

16. Local and regional authorities should support those associations or groups which favour the mobility of young people (young workers, students, or volunteers) through exchange policies, and develop networking policies and an awareness of European citizenship.

17. Local and regional authorities should encourage young people, their organisations and their schools to participate actively in international twinning activities, all types of exchanges, and European networks. These authorities should be ready to give them financial support, in order to promote language learning and intercultural exchanges, as well as exchanges of experience.

18. They should include young people and/or their representatives in the twinning committees and other organs responsible for implementing these exchanges.

1.6. A health policy

19. With a view to promoting the emergence and implementation of projects that originate from young people and promote both the development of the concept of all-round health and the dynamics of community life, local and regional

authorities should create or develop institutional machinery for consultation between youth organisations, elected representatives and all social and professional groups concerned with social welfare and the promotion of health.

20. Faced with the ravages of tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse among young people, local and regional authorities should introduce, develop or promote, together with representatives of youth organisations and of health services, local information policies and counselling facilities for young people affected by these problems, as well as special training policies for young social workers and for voluntary workers and leaders of organisations operating prevention and rehabilitation strategies for the young people concerned.

21. In view of the current increase in sexually transmitted diseases, local and regional authorities should intensify information campaigns and preventive measures aimed at young people, thus promoting within the community a spirit of solidarity engendering social relationships in which moral judgments and segregation have no place. Young people and the representatives of local youth organisations and of health services should be closely involved in the design and implementation of these information and action programmes.

1.7. A gender equality policy

22. As part of their policies to create optimum conditions for equal participation by women and men in local and regional affairs, local and regional authorities should take affirmative action in support of the access of young men and women to positions of responsibility within professional life, associations, politics and local and regional authorities.

23. Within the limits of their powers, local and regional authorities should promote, from early childhood onwards, an educational policy of equality between women and men.

24. To promote a policy of equality between women and men, local and regional authorities should:

- i. draw up a medium-term plan with the aim of eliminating inequalities between young men and young women;
- ii. Implement and evaluate measures which promote equal opportunities for girls and young women.

25. In order to achieve this aim, these policies should in particular enable girls and young women:

- i. to receive specific information on training courses leading to professional qualifications;
- ii. to learn occupational skills by offering grants and specific courses of study in professions including those which have traditionally been filled by men;
- iii. to train them in the running of public affairs by entrusting them with responsibilities at the highest level, on the basis of a quota of places reserved for women;
- iv. to introduce financial measures for social services which assist girls and young women.

1.8. A specific policy for rural regions

26. Local and regional authorities need to take into account the different needs of young people in rural areas when

developing or establishing actions and activities to promote youth participation. Therefore, they should:

- i. ensure that educational, employment, housing, transport and other sectoral policies reflect and address the special needs of young people living in rural areas. These policies should help young people who want to live in rural areas to do so. Young people living in rural areas should not have to endure or expect a lower level of social services and provision than those living in urban areas;
- ii. provide financial and other support to youth organisations and other community organisations active in rural areas. These organisations can stimulate social and cultural life in rural communities and can be an important social outlet for young people. Youth and other community organisations not only play an important role in encouraging youth participation; they can also enhance the quality of life and combat problems such as rural isolation.

1.9. A policy on access to culture

27. Art and culture exist in forms that are both multiple and constantly changing, according to tastes, places and period. They are, however, part of the past, present and future personal and collective heritage, to which successive generations contribute. They are, in a way, the reflection of each society. Young people, through their practice of culture and their capacity for initiative, exploration and innovation, build and play a role in these cultural developments. It is therefore important to allow them access to culture in all its forms and to promote their possibilities for creative activity including in new fields.

28. Local and regional authorities should therefore adopt, in association with young people and their organisations, policies designed to allow them to become cultural actors, with access to knowledge, the practice of culture and creative activity in places and using methods designed for that purpose.

I.10. A policy for sustainable development and for the environment

29. Faced with an increasingly obvious deterioration of the environment, local and regional authorities should give financial support to educational projects in schools and associations, in order to raise awareness of environmental problems.

30. Aware that environmental problems are of primary concern to the young people who will be obliged in the future to cope with the consequences of past mistakes, local and regional authorities should support activities and projects which promote sustainable development and environmental protection and which involve young people and their organisations.

1.11. A policy to combat violence and crime

31. Bearing in mind that the victims of crime and violence are often young people, and recognising the necessity of finding adequate responses to the crime and violence in contemporary society, as well as the need to involve young people directly in combating these problems.

32. Local and regional authorities should:

- i. include young people in crime prevention councils, where these exist;

- ii. work in particular with young people who risk being involved in crime or who have already been involved in crime;
 - iii. combat racist violence by all means available;
 - iv. tackle all forms of violence in schools. This should be done in co-operation with all relevant actors, such as educational and police authorities, teachers, parents and young people themselves;
 - v. contribute to the creation of networks of associations and projects promoting non-violence projects and tolerance both in school and out of school;
 - vi. do their utmost to protect young people from sexual exploitation, abuse or other forms of maltreatment and provide structures that provide psychological and material support and confidential consultation to victims.
33. In implementing the above, local and regional authorities contribute towards building a climate of trust and respect between young people and public authorities such as the police.

1.12. An anti-discrimination policy

34. Local and regional authorities should actively promote human rights and measures to counter discrimination against minorities (including their young members) or against young people with disabilities and other population groups that may suffer discrimination, and should promote the development of multicultural communities through the integration of minorities, taking account of their diverse needs and customs, cultures and lifestyles.

35. In this connection, local and regional authorities should:
- i. pass or reinforce anti-discrimination legislation so as to ensure equal access for all citizens to public places, to vocational training, to schooling, to housing, to cultural activities and to other areas of life. Such access should be monitored and guaranteed by joint bodies comprising local government representatives and representatives of minorities and young people themselves;
 - ii. foster inter-religious dialogue, multicultural, anti-racist education and education against discrimination as part of the school curriculum.

I.13. A policy on sexuality

36. During their transition from childhood dependence on family, school, religious community or other “authorities” towards an autonomous adult life, young people may be faced with a variety of questions on issues connected to their personal relationships (within the family or close circle, with their peers, with their friend or partner). The emergence and exercise of their sexuality is not always easy, even if they are not ready to admit it. In addition, there is a persistent ignorance surrounding issues of sexual health and mistrust towards official attitudes concerning the risks of certain sexual behaviours.

37. In order to help young people find their way in this area towards a healthy and fulfilling emotional life, local and regional authorities, in association with parents, schools and organisations specialised in this field, should promote and support:

- i. non-directive sex education in schools;

- ii. organisations and services offering information about relationships, sexual methods and family planning;
- iii. peer group work in this field.

38. Young people should be actively associated with the planning, implementation and evaluation of information and other services aimed at young people in this field.

I.14. A policy of access to rights and law

39. In order to live together, societies are based on rules which must be respected by all. In democratic societies, these rules are discussed and adopted by the citizens' elected representatives and given concrete expression, particularly in legislative texts which bestow rights and obligations upon all persons.

40. As these texts increase in number, it is more and more difficult for the individual to know, respect and apply them, thus creating disparities between citizens. Young people are the most naturally concerned by this phenomenon.

41. Local and regional authorities should therefore facilitate young people's access to their rights:

- i. by developing their knowledge through the dissemination of information, particularly in schools, peer groups and information services;
- ii. by the application of their rights through the support of services designed to work alongside young people who desire this;
- iii. by allowing young people to participate in the drawing-up of new rules.

Part II: Instruments for youth participation

42. In order to achieve real youth participation a certain number of instruments need to be placed at young people's disposal. This entails developing participation training for young people, keeping them informed, providing them with means of communication, supporting their projects, and recognising and giving a higher profile to young people's dedication to community causes and voluntary work. Participation only takes on full meaning where young people's role in political parties, trade unions and associations is acknowledged and, above all, where an effort is made to promote youth associations set up with and by young people themselves.

II.1. Training in youth participation

43. Local and regional authorities, conscious of the dominant role that the school plays in the life of young people, should provide, in the school environment, support and training in youth participation, human rights education and non-formal learning in schools. They should also provide training and support for the participation of young people in associative life and in their local community by promoting:

- i. vocational training for teachers and youth workers in the practice of youth participation;
- ii. all forms of participation of pupils in schools;
- iii. civic education programmes in schools;
- iv. peer-group education, by providing the necessary space and means and by supporting the exchange of good practice.

II.2. Informing young people

44. Information is often a key to participation, and the right of young people to have access to information about opportunities and matters which concern them is increasingly recognised in official European and international documents,¹ and not only in the context of local and regional life.

45. In order to participate in activities and in the life of their community, or to benefit from services and opportunities aimed at them, young people need to know about them. Participating in activities and projects of interest to them and which they organise themselves is often a step in a process encouraging their deeper involvement in the community, including its political life.

46. Local and regional authorities should therefore support and improve existing information and counselling centres for young people, in order to ensure that they provide services of quality that meet the needs expressed by young people. Where such centres do not exist, local and regional authorities and other relevant actors should promote and assist the creation of adequate information services for young people, inter alia, through existing structures such as schools, youth service and libraries. Specific measures should be taken to meet the information needs of groups of young people who have difficulty in accessing information (language barriers, no access to the Internet, etc.).

1. See for example Recommendation No. R (90) 7 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe concerning information and counselling for young people in Europe, adopted on 21 February 1990.

47. Information services for young people must conform to certain professional principles and standards.² Public authorities are encouraged to guarantee such standards and to promote their continual improvement, where possible in accordance with a set of nationally (or regionally) agreed quality measures and standards. Young people should have the possibility to participate in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the activities and products of youth information centres/services and be represented in their governing bodies.

II.3. Promoting youth participation through information and communication technologies

48. Information and communication technologies can offer new possibilities for informing and allowing the participation of young people. They can be used to exchange a wide variety of information, and thanks to their inter-activity, to increase the participation of young people. Local and regional authorities should therefore use these technologies in their information and participation policies, on the condition that access to them is guaranteed for all young people in terms of places of access to and training in these new tools.

II.4. Promoting young people's participation in the media

49. Whilst young people are major media consumers, they can also be actors in this field by increasing the possibilities they are given to express themselves and participate in the production of the information supplied by the media.

2. See for example the European Youth Information Charter adopted by the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA).

Through their way of dealing with certain subjects, they allow different and often more accessible information to be provided for their peers. This participation also allows young people to understand the construction of information and to develop the necessary critical faculty.

50. Local and regional authorities should therefore support the creation and the functioning of the media (radio, television, the written and electronic press, etc.) developed by and for young people, as well as relevant training programmes.

II.5. Encouraging young people to undertake voluntary work and dedicate themselves to community causes

51. Young people should be supported and encouraged to engage in voluntary activity. At a time when young people are under increasing pressure to perform and succeed as individuals in education and in the world of work, it is important that volunteerism is promoted and recognised. Therefore, local and regional authorities should:

- i. support the establishment of volunteer centres and develop initiatives aimed at supporting and promoting the involvement of young people in voluntary activity such as information and promotional campaigns.
- ii. in partnership with young people, voluntary organisations, educational authorities and employers, develop systems which recognise and validate voluntary activity in the formal education system and in employment.

II.6. Support for young people's projects and initiatives

52. Through their hopes and their desires, young people have many ideas which can be translated into projects and

local activities that are beneficial to all. Given proper support, these projects, and their successes as well as their failures, can also help young people to develop their sense of responsibility and their autonomy, thus becoming social actors. Local and regional authorities should therefore facilitate the implementation of these projects, be they small- or large-scale, by allowing them to be accompanied in their execution by professionals and to have access to financial, material and technical assistance.

II.7. Promoting young people's organisations

53. Youth organisations are unique in that they are primarily focused on reflecting the views and serving the needs and interests of young people. They also provide a space where young people can learn and experience the opportunities and challenges of participating in decisions and actions with other young people. They can be structured organisations or they can be informal groups of young people. It is important that young people have the opportunity to join a youth organisation of their choice in their community if they so wish. Young people should also have the right and be supported to establish their own organisations if they want to. Therefore:

- i. local and regional authorities should have a specific budget designated solely for supporting youth organisations that run activities or provide services or act as the voice of young people in the community and advocate on their behalf. Preference should be given to organisations that are run by and for young people and/or have policies and systems in place to enable active youth participation;

- ii. local and regional authorities should develop the Council of Europe co-management principle and system of decision making in partnership with young people and youth organisations in policy areas of relevance to young people. It is important that where such co-management structures are put in place, young people and youth organisations are respected as full partners and also have the choice not to participate if they so wish.

II.8. Youth participation in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and political parties

54. A vibrant, independent and active non-governmental sector is an essential element of any truly democratic society. It is also important that other sectors of civil society such as political parties are strong and active at a local and regional level. Participation in the democratic life of any country, region or locality is about more than voting every few years. That is why participation in NGOs and political parties is so important, because they help citizens to be involved in, and influence, decisions and actions on an ongoing basis. Therefore it is crucial that young people are encouraged and supported to participate in associative life in their communities.

55. Local and regional authorities should provide financial and other resources to NGOs which actively promote the participation of young people in their activities and democratic decision-making structures and procedures.

56. Local and regional authorities, in partnership with political parties and in a non-partisan manner, should promote the involvement of young people in the party political system in general, and support specific actions, such as training.

Part III: Institutional participation by young people in local and regional affairs

57. In order to carry out the sectoral policies set out in Part I, local and regional authorities should undertake to put in place the appropriate structures or arrangements enabling the participation of young people in the decisions and debates affecting them.

58. These structures will take on different forms according to the level at which they are established, be it that of a village, a town, an urban neighbourhood within a city, or even a region. They should create the conditions for genuine dialogue and partnership between young people and local and regional authorities and they should enable young people and their representatives to be full actors in the policies affecting them. Such structures should normally be representative and permanent, dealing with all matters in which young people express an interest. In addition it can be envisaged that an ad hoc structure can be made to debate or act upon a specific issue. On occasion it may be appropriate to combine different forms.

III.1. Youth councils, youth parliaments, youth forums

59. Effective participation of young people in local and regional affairs should be based on their awareness of the social and cultural changes taking place within their community, and requires a permanent representative structure such as a youth council, a youth parliament or a youth forum.

60. Such a structure may be composed by election, or by appointment from within organisations of young people and/or on a voluntary basis. Its membership should reflect the community's sociological make-up.

61. Young people should assume direct responsibility for projects and play an active part in the related policies. For this purpose, local and regional authorities should create or support structures for active participation.

62. These structures provide the physical framework for the free expression by young people of their concerns, particularly as regards the raising of such concerns with the authorities, and the possibility of making proposals to them. Issues to be raised might reflect those laid out in Part I of the present Charter.

63. The roles of such a structure might include:

- i. providing a forum for the free expression by young people of their concerns, relating, *inter alia*, to proposals and policies of the authorities;
- ii. offering the possibility for young people to make proposals to the local and regional authorities;
- iii. enabling authorities to consult young people on specific issues;
- iv. providing a forum where projects involving young people are developed, monitored and evaluated;
- v. providing a forum to facilitate consultation with young people's associations and organisations;
- vi. facilitating the participation of young people in other consultative bodies of the local and regional authorities.

64. By giving young people the opportunity to speak and act on the problems affecting them, such structures provide training in democratic life and the management of public affairs.

65. Young people should therefore be encouraged to participate in such structures and the activities undertaken within their framework, in order to promote their capacities for learning about and practicing the principles of democratic citizenship. Particularly for those young people who are instigators of projects and dialogue with the authorities, such structures should also provide a forum for training in democratic leadership.

66. The local and regional authorities, and the young people themselves, will also benefit from the multiplier effect that the act of participation by young people in such structures can bring, particularly in terms of encouraging young people in the exercise of their civic rights, such as participation in elections and other forms of polling including referenda.

III.2. Support for structures of youth participation

67. In order to function effectively, institutional structures of youth participation (whether they are formal or informal) require resources and support. To this end, local and regional authorities should provide such structures with the space, financial means and material support necessary for the purpose of ensuring their smooth and effective operation. The provision of such means does not exclude such structures from seeking additional financial and material support from other sources, such as private foundations and companies.

68. Local and regional authorities should ensure that the provision of support to structures of youth participation is guaranteed. To this end, they should appoint a guarantor – a person or group of persons – to follow implementation of

support measures, to whom the structures can address themselves in case of need.

69. Such a person or group of persons should be independent from the political structures and from the structures of youth participation, and nomination is agreed upon by both of the above.

70. In addition to guaranteeing the above-mentioned support, the functions of this person(s) could include:

- i. acting as the interface between young people and the elected local and regional representatives on any issue raised by either of these;
- ii. acting as the advocate for young people vis-à-vis the local and regional authorities in situations of tension between the two;
- iii. acting as a channel through which local and regional authorities can communicate with young people;
- iv. preparing regular reports for the attention of young people and the local and regional authorities in order to evaluate the level of participation by young people in local and regional life, for example through the implementation of projects or involvement in structures of youth participation, and the impact of their participation.

Recommendation 128 (2003)³ on the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

The Congress,

1. Recalling the elaboration and adoption in 1992 of the text that was to become the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life;
2. Bearing in mind all activities carried out to promote the objectives of the Charter since then, notably:
 - a. the conference “Europe 2000 – Young People and their Towns. What involvement? Comparing Policies” held in Budapest in 1997;
 - b. the conference “Young People – Actors in their Towns and Regions” held in Krakow in 2002, organised in co-operation with the Directorate of Youth and Sport;
3. Recalling CLRAE Resolutions 43 (1997) on “Opening up Europe to the young: towns and regions in action” and 78 (1999) on “Europe 2000 youth participation: the role of young people as citizens”;

3. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 21 May 2003, 2nd Sitting (see Document CG (10) 6, draft recommendation presented by Mrs B. Fäldt, rapporteur).

4. Recalling CLRAE Recommendation 59 (1999) on “Europe 2000 youth participation: the role of young people as citizens”;
5. Taking into account Recommendation Rec(2001)19 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the participation of citizens in local public life, the final version of which refers to CLRAE Opinion 15 (2001);
6. Recognising the need for the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life not to remain a static instrument, but to make it address the changing issues experienced by young people;
7. Conscious that direct involvement of youth in the affairs of society remains essential, as a safeguard for democracy and for sustainable development in the municipalities and regions;
8. Considering that the involvement of young people in decision making, in particular when the matter at hand has a direct impact on their lives, is essential for maintaining the legitimacy of decision making;
9. Believing that early positive experiences of participation are likely to lead to active involvement in community matters at a more mature age;
10. Emphasising that such involvement must be real and effective and not just an inclusion of young people in consultative bodies without any real possibility to participate in the actual decision making;
11. Convinced that the Charter needs to provide guidelines for local and regional authorities on how to pursue policies affecting young people, and to provide the tools for participation by the young people themselves;

12. Aware of the importance of providing necessary and equal access to the new information technologies as these have an enormous potential to increase participation of young people in society;
13. Recognising that education about rights and duties of citizens in a democratic society must be made an integral part of any school curriculum to enable young people to contribute actively to democratic decision making;
14. Holding the view that special efforts must be made to include categories of young people who for one reason or another have difficulty getting involved in local and regional life;
15. Reaffirming its belief that special measures should be introduced to promote real participation of young people where young people participate less actively than elsewhere;
16. Believing that specific instruments should be developed to measure the degree to which young people participate in elected bodies or are active through electoral or direct forms of participation;
17. Recognising the need to find adequate responses to the crime and violence in contemporary society and the need to involve young people directly in combating these problems, as young people often are victims of crime and violence;
18. United in the belief that all means available must be used to protect young people from sexual exploitation as well as any other form of abuse;
19. Marking its full agreement of the updated version of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life;

20. Invites the Committee of Ministers to:

- a.* adopt the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (see appendix) as a recommendation to its member states;
- b.* request the appropriate Council of Europe services to continue, in co-operation with the CLRAE, activities in the field of participation of young people in local and regional life.

Explanatory Memorandum CG (10) 6

Part II on the Revised European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life⁴ (15/04/03)

Rapporteur: Brith FÄLDT (Sweden)

The Conference “Young People – Actors in their Towns and Regions” was held on 7-8 March 2002 in Krakow (CF Final Declaration – Appendix). It was organised by the Culture and Education Committee of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE), in partnership with the Council of Europe’s Directorate of Youth and Sport and at the invitation of, and in co-operation with, the City of Krakow. Moreover, the Conference constituted a contribution to the Council of Europe Integrated Project “Making Democratic Institutions Work”.

This Conference was organised on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and the general purpose was to evaluate the progress made in the field of youth participation during the Charter’s ten years of existence, while discussing ways of further promoting youth participation, amongst others by disseminating good practices.

4. Unanimously approved by the members of the Culture and Education Committee (Plenary Committee) on 19 March 2003.

Perhaps the most important decision taken by the participants was to request the CLRAE and the Advisory Council on Youth Questions of the Council of Europe, to:

- appoint experts to prepare proposals for amending the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life in order to make it respond to the challenges of the 21st century;
- prepare a manual of good practice on the functioning of youth councils at local and regional level.

Following this request, three working meetings were organised consisting of experts representing the CLRAE on the one hand and the above Advisory Council on the other hand.

Ms Brith FÄLDT, Municipal Councillor, Pitea (Sweden), was appointed as Rapporteur by the Committee on Culture and Education at its October meeting 2002.

The experts were:

- Mr. Didi BAENZIGER, “Swiss Council for youth activities”, President of the Working Group on the revision of the Charter;
- Mr. Jon ALEXANDER, European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) (France);
- Mr. Claude CASAGRANDE, Former President of Youth Planet, Former Vice-President of the CLRAE;
- Mr. James DOORLEY, National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) (Ireland);
- Mr. Mikael GARNIER-LAVALLEY, Representative of the Board of the National Association of Children and Youth Councils (ANACEJ) (France);

- Mr. Jean-Claude RICHEZ, Head of the Research, Study and Training Unit of the INJEP (National Institute for Youth and Community Education) (France);
- Ms Anca SIRBU, UNITED for Intercultural Action (Romania);
- Ms Frédérique LOUTREL, Municipal Councillor (Strasbourg), in charge of children in difficulty, also took part in a meeting of the group.

The Secretariat of the CLRAE (Mr Ulrich BOHNER, Deputy Chief Executive); Mr Jean-Paul CHAUVET, Secretary of the Culture and Education Committee; Mr Mats LINDBERG, Secretary of the Culture and Education Committee of the Chamber of Regions), as well as the Directorate of Youth and Sport (Mr Michael INGLEDOW), also participated in the debates of the meetings, and assured the secretariat of the Group.

The expert group held its first two meetings on 5-6 September and 25-26 November 2002 and the third and final one on 15-17 January 2003. It is out of the deliberations of this expert group that this revised Charter is born. The present version of the Charter has a more logical structure. It has been divided into three sections. The first provides local and regional authorities with guidelines for how to conduct policies affecting young people in a number of areas. The second part lists the tools for furthering the participation of young people. Finally, the third section provides advice on how to provide institutional conditions for participation of young people.

The revised Charter (see Appendix to the draft Recommendation, CG (10) 6) contains new chapters on some policy areas that have emerged as entirely new, or have gained in importance with a view to encouraging the participation of young

people in local and regional life. An example of the former is the information society, including the use of the Internet, which has become potentially a most powerful tool in developing the participation of young people. The authors of the revised Charter recognise the enormous potential that new technologies have with a view to promoting participation by young people, but they also realise the risk of exclusion run by young people who are left without access to these new tools.

Urban insecurity and violence are phenomena which regrettably have become more prominent over the past decade. The authors wish to emphasise the necessity of finding new ways of tackling these disturbing phenomena.

The authors of the revised Charter also wish to reiterate, below, some of the main messages of the Krakow Declaration while adding some further considerations which they regard as essential, some of which also appear in the Preamble to the revised Charter.

The active participation of young people in decisions and actions at a local and regional level is essential with a view to building more democratic, inclusive and prosperous societies. Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.

Local and regional authorities – as the authorities closest to all people, including the young – have a very important role to play in promoting youth participation. In doing so,

local and regional authorities can ensure that young people not only hear and learn about democracy and citizenship, but also have the opportunity to practice it. However, youth participation is not solely about developing active citizens or building democracy for the future. It is vital if participation is to be meaningful for young people, that they can influence and shape decisions and actions when they are young and not only at some later stage in life.

It is particularly important to ensure that all young people have a real possibility of participating and not only the ones who are naturally inclined, and have easy access to means which enable them to be active in society. It follows that special measures should be undertaken to support the participation of categories of young people, who for one reason or the other, have particular difficulties getting involved in local and regional life.

When local and regional authorities support and promote youth participation, they also contribute to the social integration of young people, helping them to deal not only with the challenges and pressures of youth, but also with the challenges of a modern society where anonymity and individualism are often predominant. Any policy or action designed to promote youth participation must ensure that the cultural environment is one of respect for young people and must also take into account the diverse needs, circumstances and aspirations of young people.

The Rapporteur of the present report would also like to emphasise that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), whatever their aims, have a fundamental role to play in promoting participation of young people as citizens. The

Rapporteur hence wishes to recall the lessons learnt at the Budapest conference held on 28 February-1 March 2003 on “NGOs and local and regional democracy : the role of NGOs in promoting participation in local politics”. One of the four workshops of the Conference was dedicated to discussions about the participation of young people in local and regional life.

Soon the revised Charter will be accompanied by a “Manual of good practices”, providing examples of successful ways in which young people are participating in the life of European municipalities and regions.

Appendix

Conference “Young people, Actors in their Towns and Regions”, Krakow, Poland, 7-8 March 2002 – Final declaration

Gathered together to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Council of Europe Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life on 7-8 March 2002, the Conference “Young People, Actors in their Towns and Regions” adopted the Krakow Declaration.

1. Participation of young people in local and regional life

1.1. Young people are citizens in the municipalities and regions where they live, in the same way as any other age group, and must therefore have access to all forms of participation in society. Reaffirming and promoting the role of young people in the development of a democratic society, in particular in local and regional public life, must be a continuous process;

1.2. Participation of young people is not only a matter of active involvement in decision making in various institutions, but also of taking part in cultural life and all kinds of community events;

1.3. The participation of young people in local political life requires the political will and commitment of elected representatives to develop a permanent dialogue;

1.4. Young people are concerned by decision making in all policy areas, such as education, housing, environment, urban and rural questions, employment and health;

1.5. The youth councils that exist in most Council of Europe member States are excellent means for involving young people in decision making. The time has come to undertake a European-level overview of the number, structure and activities of these councils;

1.6. Youth Councils must be open to all young people, regardless of their social and/or ethnic origins;

1.7. More contacts and exchange of experience, on a European level, between the youth councils, through developing networks, would be desirable;

1.8. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), whatever their aims, have a fundamental role to play in promoting participation of young people as citizens. The role of NGOs in promoting participation in local politics will be further elaborated at a CLRAE conference scheduled for 2003.

2. Early participation of young people in democratic decision making

2.1. Early participation of young people in institutions such as youth councils, fosters understanding of political life and of

democratic procedures, and helps bolster democratic values. Hence it is logical that the present conference, in the organisation of which both the CLRAE and the Council of Europe Directorate of Youth and Sport have participated, constitutes a contribution to the Council of Europe Integrated Project “Making Democratic Institutions Work” and serves as a prime example of such an integrated approach;

2.2. Early participation forges a sense of citizenship and belonging which provides young people with a better knowledge of society and with a sense of security, which helps them to face the pressures of growing up in a modern society;

2.3. Early participation of young people in democratic decision making is likely to lead to active involvement in community matters at a more mature age;

2.4. In many countries lowering the age limit for voting in local and regional elections could encourage the participation of young people in democratic life.

3. Responding to new challenges to participation faced by young people in contemporary society

3.1. Young people face challenges in contemporary society which have increased in recent years or which did not exist at all in previous times. These are, inter alia, the information society, precarity of the labour market and urban insecurity in a growing context of globalisation;

3.2. One way of fighting urban insecurity is the creation of networks of associations and projects promoting anti-violence projects and tolerance both in school and out of school;

3.3. Some young people, face bigger challenges to participation than others because of socio-economic conditions,

discriminatory attitudes or other factors. It is of utmost importance to support these young people to become active citizens, not least to avoid negative phenomena such as exclusion and negative behaviour like violence and drug abuse that risk marginalising them;

3.4. Positive experiences in this field have been gained in municipalities in certain countries where young adults, themselves from these same environments, have been engaged by the municipality to act as role models and as contact persons, while promoting constructive behaviour and stemming violence and other undesirable expressions of urbanisation and modern life;

3.5. Participation of young people in various organised community activities is likely to increase their interest in political life as well;

3.6. In the context of a democratic society, an involvement of young people in different forms of political life (parties, associations, clubs) can allow them to face up to their convictions concerning local, regional, national and European public life;

3.7. The European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life should be amended with a view to making it respond to all new challenges faced by young people today.

4. The participants

4.1. Request the CLRAE and the Advisory Council on Youth Questions of the Council of Europe to:

- appoint experts to prepare proposals for amending the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in

Local and Regional Life in order to make it respond to the challenges of the 21st century;

- prepare a manual of good practice on the functioning of youth councils at local and regional level;
- promote a European network of cities and regions with youth councils;

4.2. Invite the CLRAE to prepare a report on the recommendations of this conference to be examined at its mini-session in March 2003, to approve the new text of the Charter and then to propose it to the Committee of Ministers;

4.3. Call on the Committee of Ministers to support the principles of the Charter and invite governments to promote the Charter and remove any legal and financial obstacles to young persons' participation at local and regional level.

5. The participants appeal to local and regional authorities to:

5.1. Make efforts to encourage young people in particular to participate actively at all levels of local and regional life;

5.2. Promote access to elective responsibilities as of the legally-allowed age;

5.3. Try out new, innovative ways of involving young people in decision making;

5.4. Create mechanisms for seeking the opinion of young people about all policy areas, including the policy issues listed in 1.4;

5.5. Provide the tools for participation in the Information Society to all young people, for example by providing easy

access to Internet terminals, be that through libraries, media centres, schools etc;

5.6. Reach out especially to all young people and particularly to the most marginalised, who face particular challenges to participation;

5.7. Ensure the implementation of the Charter, and to supply information required for drafting regular reports on its implementation.

Recommendation Rec(2004)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the participation of young people in local and regional life

*(adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 17 November 2004,
at the 904th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to the objectives of the Council of Europe in the youth field and in the field of local and regional authorities;

Having regard to Resolution Res(2003)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on youth policy at the Council of Europe;

Having regard to Recommendation Rec(2001)19 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the participation of citizens in local public life;

Having regard to the relevant conclusions of the six Conferences of European Ministers responsible for Youth held between 1985 and 2002, and particularly the adoption of participation issues as a priority field of action by the sixth conference (Thessaloniki, 7-9 November 2002);

Recalling the adoption in 1992 by the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life;

Bearing in mind the conclusions of the Conference on “Young People, Actors in their Towns and Regions” (Krakow, 7-8 March 2002), as a good example of cooperation between the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Directorate of Youth and Sport;

Bearing in mind the ongoing work within the European Union on the development of common objectives on youth participation in the implementation process of the White Paper on “A new impetus for European youth”, as well as the cooperation between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in this process;

Reaffirming the vital role of young people’s participation in the building of civil society, and the need for all youth policies to consider youth as a resource rather than as a problem;

Considering that the participation of young people is a determining factor in ensuring social cohesion and in making democracy work;

Recalling the work undertaken by the Council of Europe on promoting education for democratic citizenship;

Recalling the need for all national youth policies to reach down to the local level in order to react in an appropriate and flexible manner to the needs, wishes and culture of young people;

Concerned by the fact that Europe today is facing a number of challenges regarding the participation of young people

in institutional and associative life, particularly in traditional structures;

Underlining the fact that associative life is, particularly for young people, a favourable place for learning about democracy and that its development contributes to the strengthening of civil society and of democratic security on the European continent,

Recommends that the governments of member states, taking account of their respective legislative, administrative and constitutional arrangements, promote and support the implementation of the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, adopted within Recommendation 128 (2003) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and, in order to do this:

- a. encourage local and regional authorities to take into account the principles set out in the revised Charter when developing and implementing policies and programmes in all fields concerning young people;
- b. promote an environment favourable to active participation by young people in local and regional life, by encouraging local and regional authorities:
 - i. to encourage the participation of young people in associative life, particularly in youth organisations, and develop co-operation, where appropriate in the form of partnerships, between youth organisations and local and regional authorities;
 - ii. to establish, at local and regional level, for example, youth consultative bodies such as municipal youth

councils, youth parliaments or forums, allowing all young people, whether or not they belong to organisations or associations, to express their opinions and present proposals on the formulation and implementation of policies affecting them;⁵

- iii. to promote all forms of active participation by children and young people in educational establishments;
 - iv. to promote the training of youth workers, teachers, and other relevant actors, including civil servants at local and regional level, in youth participation;
 - v. to provide information and advice to young people regarding participation;
- c. encourage governments to enhance the possibilities for young people of voting age permanently and legally residing on respective territories to participate in local and regional elections;
 - d. encourage local and regional authorities to integrate into the practice of local and regional democracy the work undertaken by the Council of Europe on education for democratic citizenship in the context of formal and non-formal education;
 - e. invite local and regional authorities, in consultation with young people and involved partners, to follow up and monitor the implementation of the revised European

5. Bearing in mind the principles of the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages (CETS No. 148).

Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life;

Instructs the Secretary General to transmit the present Recommendation to States Parties to the European Cultural Convention which are not members of the Council of Europe;

Instructs the Secretary General to transmit the present Recommendation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in order that it be taken into account in the framework of the reports by the Congress on local and regional democracy.

Young people must be included in democratic structures and processes, have their voices heard and make decisions on issues that impact on them and their lives. Their active participation is essential if we are to build more democratic, caring and prosperous societies.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe is convinced that it is at local and regional levels that a culture of youth participation can most effectively take root and thrive. As far back as 1992, the Congress was the driving force behind the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, revised in 2003 to better reflect changes in society.

The revised Charter contains principles, best practices and guidelines to enhance youth participation at local and regional levels. It also sets out the basic requirements for this participation to be meaningful, i.e. young people must have the necessary rights, means, space, opportunity and support. The Charter is not a legally binding instrument but member states have a moral responsibility to implement it.

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an institution of the Council of Europe, responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its 47 member states. Composed of two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions – and three Committees, it comprises 636 elected representatives representing more than 200,000 local and regional authorities.