

48th SESSION**Fact-finding mission on local elections in Bucharest (9 June 2024)**

Recommendation 524 (2025)¹

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) refers to:

a. Article 1, paragraph 3 of the Committee of Ministers’ Statutory Resolution CM/Res (2020)1 on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;

b. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122), which was ratified by Romania in 1993, as well as its Additional protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207), ratified by Romania in 2023;

c. Chapter XIX of the Rules and Procedures on the practical organisation of election observation missions;

d. the Venice Commission Opinion on the Emergency Ordinance regarding some measures for the organisation and conduct of the elections for members from Romania in the European Parliament in 2024 and the elections for local public administration authorities in 2024, adopted on 14 March 2025.

2. The Congress reiterates the fact that genuinely democratic local and regional elections are part of a process of establishing and maintaining democratic governance and that observation of grassroots elections is a key element in the Congress’s role as guardian of democracy at local and regional level.

3. The Congress regretted not receiving an invitation to observe the 2024 local elections in Romania, which would have allowed it to base this report on its own observations. It refers to the subsequent circular letter addressed by the Congress on 18 September 2024 to all member States’ Permanent Representations to encourage national authorities systematically to invite the Congress to observe local and regional elections.

4. The Congress acknowledges that, overall, the legal framework is conducive to holding democratic elections at local and regional levels in Romania. However, it considers that the stability of the electoral framework is paramount to ensure trust in the impartiality of the electoral process and deplores the fact that the emergency ordinance to hold local and European Parliament elections on the same day was adopted shortly before the elections, which caused legal uncertainty and implementation challenges, and was not in line with the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters.

5. Based on the findings of the mission and observations made by domestic and international election observers, the Congress notes with satisfaction that:

a. despite local and European Parliament elections being held on the same day, the campaign was competitive and predominantly focused on local issues, and voter turnout increased;

¹ Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2025 (see document [CPL\(2025\)48-06](#), explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Randi MONDORF, Denmark (R, ILDG) and Jorge SEQUEIRA, Portugal (L, SOC/G/PD).

b. the election administration managed most challenges posed by the emergency ordinance efficiently, and election day was largely held in an orderly and professional manner, with the notable exception of counting;

c. the expanded use of technology enhanced transparency at key stages of the electoral process;

d. measures to monitor campaign financing and prevent illicit funding were welcomed, contributing to increased transparency and in particular, the obligation to publish weekly campaign expenditure.

6. At the same time, the Congress expresses its concern with respect to the following issues:

a. the adoption of an emergency ordinance to amend the legal framework was finalised less than three months before the election day, undermined legal certainty and did not provide enough opportunity for the text to be thoroughly debated and adopted by broad consensus, despite the 2024 electoral calendar being predictable;

b. while many EU countries traditionally hold European Parliament and local elections on the same day, this change posed considerable challenges to the election administration in Romania;

c. the legal framework was complex and fragmented across multiple texts, creating potential loopholes, differences in interpretations, which negatively affecting its readability; efforts to reform it were seen as lacking political support;

d. on election day, the excessive workload placed on polling station commissioners, exhaustion of staff and lack of awareness of the revised procedures led to errors and rushed procedures, especially during counting and tabulation. While some violations may have been deliberate, the tiredness, lack of adequate training and complexity of procedures accounted for most of the preventable errors encountered in these stages;

e. contrary to good practice, meetings of the election administration were not open to the public and commissions benefited from a wide margin of appreciation, notably with respect to corrections of errors; the electoral dispute mechanism suffered from unrealistic deadlines notably related to candidate registration, recounts and appeals;

f. the campaign was marked by polarisation, restrictions on posters, instances of early campaigning, media bias linked to party-funded advertising, underregulated campaigning on social media and remaining gaps in transparency of party and campaign finance;

g. the changes in residency requirements as well as allegations of inaccuracies on voter registers led to confusion about deadlines and may have disenfranchised some voters;

h. women remained severely underrepresented in local decision-making and were too often placed in unwinnable positions on candidates lists;

i. citizens must be at least 23 years old to stand in local elections, which is not in line with Congress Recommendation 375 (2015) "Criteria for standing in local and regional elections";

j. election observation of the handover of ballot papers and tabulation of results, as well as of the activities of county bureaus, is not provided by law.

7. In light of the above, the Congress invites the Romanian authorities to:

a. refrain from making substantial changes to the legal framework shortly before the elections and from resorting to emergency ordinances to tackle politically sensitive subjects;

b. develop comprehensive and simplified legislation, in the form of a unified electoral law, to be adopted following open and extensive consultations in parliament and with a broad range of stakeholders;

c. review procedures applicable to the finalisation of protocols, the handover of electoral materials and tabulation of results to increase transparency and efficiency;

d. ensure better representation of political competitors in electoral commissions and build the capacity of the election administration to work transparently and professionally, through extensive training of commission members and public meetings of all electoral commissions;

e. simplify the modalities and review all deadlines applicable to complaints, recounts and appeals to provide genuine opportunities and realistic timeframes for valid challenges to be brought by voters and candidates alike and consider introducing mandatory recounts, held in presence of observers, in case of significant deviations;

f. strengthen the oversight and regulatory framework of campaign and party finance, limit the use of subsidies to fund political advertising in the media and ensure prompt investigations and appropriate sanctions, if violations occur; further regulate campaigning on social media and early campaigning;

g. systematically update voter registers based on residency criteria applicable to local elections and consider returning to a six-month residency requirement for local elections;

h. undertake urgent measures to increase the participation of women in politics, notably through the introduction of a 40% gender quota on lists and/or for mayoral positions;

i. review Article 4.1 of the Law on the Election of Local Public Administration Authorities and lower the age-limit for standing in local elections;

j. grant the right for election observers to observe all stages of the electoral process, as a means to increase public confidence in the process.

8. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation regarding the 2024 local elections in Romania and the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.