

48th SESSION

The situation of local and regional democracy in Georgia

Recommendation 526 (2025)¹

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) refers to:
 - a. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122), which was ratified by Georgia in 2004, as well as the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the rights to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207), ratified by Georgia in 2019;
 - b. Congress Recommendation 477 (2022) “Local elections in Georgia (2 October 2021)”;
 - c. Congress Recommendation 476 (2022) “The situation of independent candidates and the opposition in local and regional elections”;
 - d. Congress Recommendation 426 (2018) “Local and regional democracy in Georgia”;
 - e. Congress Declaration 10 (2024) “The situation in Georgia”, adopted during the 47th Session of the Congress, in which its members expressed deep concern over clear signs of democratic backsliding and the weakening of human rights in Georgia, marked by increased polarisation of society and the enactment of legislation that ran counter to Council of Europe standards;
 - f. the statement adopted by the Congress Bureau on 10 February 2025 on the urgent situation in Georgia, which called on the government of Georgia “to fully respect European standards [...] paving the way to free and fair repeat elections at the national level, free and fair elections at the local level and the just treatment of all Georgians including locally elected representatives”, as well as the statements of the Congress President with respect to Georgia on 15 May 2024, 18 September 2024 and 27 October 2024;
 - g. the report of the Parliamentary Assembly on the Observation of the parliamentary elections in Georgia, 26 October 2024;
 - h. the statement of the Council of Europe Secretary General on his country visit to Georgia, released on 20 December 2024, and subsequent declarations;
 - i. the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice on Electoral Matters (2002), its interpretative declaration on the stability of electoral law and recent Venice Commission opinions on Georgia;
 - j. the statement made by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights following his country visit to Georgia in January 2025, “Protect freedom of assembly and expression, ensure accountability for human rights violations and end stigmatisation of NGOs and LGBTI people”.

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress during the 48th Session on 26 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-17](#)), co-rapporteurs: Cecilia DALMAN EEK, Sweden (R, SOC/G/PD), Bernd VÖHRINGER, Germany (L, EPP/CCE).

2. The Congress recalls the Reykjavik Declaration (2023), endorsed by all Heads of State and Government, including the then Prime Minister of Georgia, in particular Appendix III on the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy (2023), which applies to all levels of government and states “We will meet our obligations under international law. We will prevent and resist democratic backsliding on our continent [...] by enhancing our shared commitments as member States of the Council of Europe”;

3. The Congress reaffirms that local and regional authorities are key in upholding and defending democracy, human rights and rule of law, not only within their communities, but as part of the system of checks and balances which represents the backbone of a genuine pluralistic democracy. It underlines the crucial importance of ensuring and guaranteeing a secure and trust-based environment for genuine, open and constructive dialogue, as well as space for the opposition, as is required in a pluralist democracy. It stresses that the right of local authorities to exercise self-government without fear of persecution or retaliation must be guaranteed regardless of the political views of their leaders and representatives.

4. The Congress also reiterates that genuine local democracy allowing all citizens to freely form and express their opinion on the matters closest to them cannot be achieved unless a wide range of other human rights and fundamental freedoms can be exercised without discrimination.

5. It highlights its commitment to pursuing constructive political dialogue with the Georgian authorities, notably in the framework of a high-level visit to Georgia. This high-level visit was carried out on behalf of the Congress by the President and the Chamber Presidents on 3-4 February 2025. On 10 February 2025, the Congress Bureau instructed the Chamber Presidents to present their report on the situation of local and regional democracy in Georgia to the Congress at its 48th Session in March 2025.

6. The Congress wishes to thank the authorities for facilitating the high-level visit, which allowed the delegation to hold open discussions with various institutions at all levels of government. The delegation also exchanged views with representatives of the opposition and civil society.

7. Based on the findings of the above-mentioned high-level visit of its three Presidents, the Congress expresses its concern on the following issues:

a. amid deepening polarisation in Georgia, the rapid and dramatic democratic backsliding observed over the past two years, has affected local democracy in Georgia increasingly: this has intensified in the aftermath of the 2024 parliamentary election, which were rejected by all opposition parties, domestic and some international election observers, notably due to concerns over their integrity, and of the decision to halt Georgian EU accession on 28 November 2024;

b. the progressive marginalisation of the opposition from the political scene and the lack of dialogue between the authorities and the opposition has led to a *de facto* absence of political pluralism, including in municipal councils. This situation has led to an excessive concentration of power by the ruling party, and has prompted the opposition to boycott all decision-making bodies, shrinking the space for negotiation and mediation;

c. following the highly controversial adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence and the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) adopted in first reading, there has been increased intimidation and stigmatisation of NGOs and dissenting voices in the media, which work under increasingly challenging conditions, undermining their freedom of association and freedom of expression. In a democratic society, freedom of expression must be protected, supported and promoted irrespective of whether it is critical of the government, and even if it is influenced by international discourse;

d. the brutal repression of peaceful protesters and opponents by law-enforcement authorities in many cities and particularly in the capital city of Tbilisi, has violated both the freedoms of expression and assembly. Moreover, freedom of assembly in Georgia has been negatively affected by recent legal amendments to increase sanctions and offences related to public demonstrations, which according to the Venice Commission introduced “vague and broadly framed provisions, granting the authorities [including local authorities] excessively broad discretion in their application”. This situation forced to local authorities to take decisions that are not compliant with democratic standards;

e. the instrumentalisation of public institutions including at local level, has resulted in numerous reports of dismissals, intimidation and pressure on civil servants, facilitated by the adoption of amendments to the Law on Public Service;

f. the recent findings by both international and domestic observers have also raised concerns regarding the politicisation of public administration, widespread misuse of administrative resources and pressure on voters during electoral campaigns, unduly tilting the playing field between candidates and distorting voters' will;

g. the legal framework applicable to local elections in Georgia has been amended repeatedly, more than 20 times since the last elections without extensive consultations and broad consensus, which is not in line with the principle of stability of electoral law. The amendments have reinforced the dominant position of the ruling party in the Central Election Commission, undermining its independence, and have also wound back fundamental rules pertaining to the electoral system, gender quotas and the establishment of electoral districts.

h. consequently, the many shortcomings and challenges affecting the respect of democracy, rule of law and human rights have led to a collapse in public confidence in democratic institutions for large parts of the Georgian population, and notably the young people, and damaged local democracy, which is not conducive to holding the 2025 local elections in a trust-based environment; in fact, it risks exacerbating the situation.

8. In the light of the above, the Congress invites the Georgian authorities, as regards the overall situation of local and regional democracy, to:

a. urgently resume political dialogue at all levels of government, through an inclusive political process which engages all stakeholders, including local authorities, opposition and civil society, to reduce polarisation, restore the checks and balances essential in a pluralist democracy and regulate the participation rights of the opposition;

b. repeal legislation in breach of human rights, in particular the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, and refrain from enacting the FARA adopted in first reading, and avoid taking any actions that would further impede the indispensable work of civil society and have a chilling effect on media outlets or undermine the foundations of democracy, all of which would be detrimental to local self-government in Georgia;

c. thoroughly investigate instances of arbitrary arrests and violent actions towards non-violent protesters and journalists at local level, as recommended by the Human Rights Commissioner, release those who are detained including Ms Mzia Amaghlobeli, and, as requested by the Venice Commission in its urgent opinion on amendments to the Code of administrative offences and the Law on assemblies and demonstrations CDL-PI(2025)004, ensure lawfulness, necessity and proportionality in the sanctions for offences related to public demonstrations in municipalities;

d. repeal the contentious amendments of the Law on Public Service and reintegrate employees of local public service dismissed on the basis of these provisions.

9. As regards elections, the Congress urges the Georgian authorities to restore the conditions for a democratic environment ahead of the 2025 local elections, in accordance with the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice on Electoral Matters and previous Congress Recommendations, as these constitute preconditions for the holding of free and fair elections, and in particular to:

a. repeal the amendments adopted in December 2024 to return to the ratio of proportional and majoritarian seats established following the 2021 broad political agreement, and, in accordance with Congress Recommendation 390 (2016) "Women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels", reinstate the gender quota applicable for candidates in local elections;

b. undertake comprehensive legislative reform to address the major shortcomings identified in this field;

c. stop cases of voter intimidation, pressure on public employees, vote buying and electoral violence and proactively investigate and sanction any such cases when they occur;

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d. guarantee the independence of the election administration and return to consensus-based decision-making involving the opposition parties in the election administration, and step up the effectiveness of existing legal provisions to prevent misuse of administrative resources;

e. take steps to encourage the opposition to take part in political processes and guarantee fair speaking time in all the media, especially the public media, for all the political parties;

f. secure the right of domestic election observers and continue to regularly invite the Congress to observe local elections in the country and in particular the upcoming local elections;

g. carry out civic education programmes for all stakeholders to mainstream democratic principles.

10. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation and the explanatory memorandum contained in document CG(2025)48-17 in their activities with respect to Georgia.