

**48th SESSION****The situation of local and regional democracy in Georgia**Resolution 509 (2025)<sup>1</sup>

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”.

<sup>1</sup> 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:

a. instructs the Monitoring Committee to continue its work to extend the guarantees for free and fair elections applicable to local and regional electoral processes and to delay the visit to monitor the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government to after the upcoming local elections;

b. stands ready to carry out, if necessary, a fact-finding or high-level visit, depending on the progress made on fulfilling the points raised in Recommendation 526 (2025) and invites the Standing Rapporteur on Human Rights to take part in such a visit to assess the situation of human rights at local level in the country;

c. invites its Bureau and Monitoring Committee to introduce a standing item on the agendas of their future meetings to discuss the situation of local democracy in Georgia until Recommendation 526 (2025) has been fully implemented;

d. continues to support the implementation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia (2024-2027) through dedicated cooperation projects; and in particular, reinforce the capacities of local authorities and their representative association, to work as a fully-fledged intermediary to promote the needs and identify the challenges existing at local level;

e. calls on the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia to ensure that it serves as the representative body of all local authorities, not only those in which the majority of seats are held by the ruling party and that all political actors take part in its work;

9. The Congress stands ready to pursue its political dialogue with the delegation of Georgia to the Congress, in its full composition, to cooperate on the implementation of Recommendation 526 (2025) and the present Resolution.