

**48th SESSION****Foreign interference in electoral processes at local and regional levels**

Recommendation 525 (2025)<sup>1</sup>

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

a. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

b. Recommendation (2003)<sup>4</sup> of the Committee of Ministers on common rules against corruption in the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns;

c. Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)<sup>5</sup> of the Committee of Ministers to member States on standards for e-voting;

d. the Committee of Ministers’ Guidelines on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in electoral processes in Council of Europe member States (2022);

e. Resolution 2390 (2021) “Transparency and regulation of donations to political parties and electoral campaigns from foreign donors” of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;

f. the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters (2002), the Venice Commission, Guidelines on Political Party Regulation, (Second Edition, 2020) and its Opinion on the Prohibition of Financial Contributions to Political Parties from Foreign Sources (2006);

g. Congress Recommendation 518 (2024) “Recurring issues based on assessments resulting from Congress monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and election observation missions (reference period 2021-2024)”;

h. Congress Recommendation 498 (2023) “Local and regional media: watchdogs of democracy, guardians of community cohesion”;

i. Congress Recommendation 478 (2022) “Hate speech and fake news: the impact on working conditions of local and regional elected representatives”;

j. the Reykjavik Declaration following the Fourth Summit of Heads of States and Government of the Council of Europe (2023), reaffirming the commitment “to hold elections and referenda in accordance with international standards and take all appropriate measures against any interference in electoral systems and processes”, and the revised Priorities of the Congress for 2021-2026;

k. United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

2. The Congress points out that:

<sup>1</sup> Debated and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2025 (see document [CG\(2025\)48-10](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Stewart DICKSON, United Kingdom (R, ILDG).

## Recommendation 525 (2025)

a. local and regional elections, while attracting modest interest from authoritarian actors, are not immune to the threat of foreign interference in electoral processes to influence the results of an election, via instances of disinformation, opportunistic cyber-attacks and illicit funding. Despite foreign interference being an old and complex phenomenon, recent geopolitical changes and new technological developments have increased the scale, the number of involved actors and the reach of such actions, making it even harder to attribute these attacks to a state actor;

b. grassroots elections should be decided by the voters residing in a community and having the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority and therefore, national, regional and local authorities should take steps to protect the integrity of electoral processes and to ensure that voters form their opinion free from interference and according to their convictions and have the freedom to express such opinion on election day;

c. while refraining from overemphasising the issue and feeding narratives about rigged electoral systems, a careful examination of recent cases reveals the emergence of many challenges in the handling of potential foreign interference, such as the corrosive effect of small incidents, the increasing manipulation of the concept for political purposes, the growing importance of non-state actors (private companies, individuals, transnational groups, etc) and domestic actors and the potential multiplier that artificial intelligence could represent.

3. In light of the foregoing, the Congress invites the Committee of Ministers to call on member States to:

a. increase efforts to gather scientific and technical knowledge about the issue of foreign interference prior to, during and after local and regional electoral processes, especially in highly contested elections;

b. acknowledge the potential risks associated with foreign interference in local and regional elections and support local and regional authorities in developing infrastructures and expertise to deal with potential threats and disruption;

c. strengthen political party and campaign finance regulations and oversight to prevent illicit funding of contestants by foreign donors and if not already the case, consider prohibiting foreign and anonymous donations to both political parties and candidates, including in local and regional elections;

d. explore ways of fostering open debate at local and regional levels, work towards debunking alternative narratives and addressing the impact of alternative information environments;

e. reinforce behavioural change by promoting voter education and awareness, in particular of new voters, or from vulnerable groups, to build capacity to identify deceptive foreign information manipulation and to encourage critical thinking, in collaboration with civil society and political parties;

f. promote capacity-building of local and regional authorities, in particular lower-level election administration bodies, on cyber security related to various aspects of the electoral process, in particular to voter registers and results management, in order to detect, understand and counter new threats to the integrity of elections;

g. build the capacities of political parties and candidates in local and regional elections to detect and prevent foreign interferences and protect their systems potential cyberattacks;

h. refrain from taking hasty measures such as enacting overly restrictive foreign influence laws, that could clearly jeopardise certain actors, including civil society, and support fact-based journalism, including in minority languages;

i. avoid holding local and regional elections on the same day as national ones, to better monitor and protect these elections from large-scale malicious operations.

4. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and other relevant institutions of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation and of the accompanying explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to member States.