

48th Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities - Strasbourg, France, 25-27 March 2025

## Speech by Bryony RUDKIN, United Kingdom (L, SOC/G/PD)

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### **Debate under urgent procedure – Dismissals of mayors in Türkiye**

27 March 2025

Dear colleagues,

Based on the situation that David Eray presented, the Bureau decided on Monday that the exceptionality of this situation required a declaration from the Congress session.

The declaration which we fully support as co-rapporteurs on the post-monitoring, clearly recalls the commitments of Türkiye, a founding member of the Council of Europe, to uphold democracy, human rights and the rule of law at all levels of government and to refrain from diverging from these standards. To inform this declaration, we held side meetings with the Permanent representation of Türkiye as well as members of the delegation of Türkiye from various political parties to hear all points of view on this matter.

This declaration regrets that arrests and dismissals of elected representatives from opposition parties and their replacement by trustees, as well as the silencing of dissenting voices, have become common place in Türkiye. And it is our opinion that it is beyond reasonable doubt that these events have the ultimate purpose of limiting freedom of political debate.

The declaration sheds light on four key points that should be addressed to reverse the clear signs of degradation of the working conditions of local and regional elected representatives and the weakening of fundamental freedoms:

Firstly, it calls on Turkish authorities to implement the Congress recommendation on the 2024 local elections and the 2020 Venice Commission's Opinion on the

replacement of elected candidates and mayors and abolish the practice of dismissing mayors and appointing trustees;

It also urges authorities to terminate overly broad limitations of freedoms of assembly and expression which are detrimental to local self-government;

Thirdly, we request to refrain from resorting to prosecutions and detentions of elected representatives from opposition parties based on a broad interpretation of the offenses of terrorism or defamation, in particular in electoral contexts;

Last, but certainly not least, in line with the caselaw of the European Court of Human Rights, we urge national authorities to release the current detainees, including Mayor İmamoğlu and notably the Congress member Abdullah Zeydan, mayor of Van, guarantee the rights of the defence and refrain from making extensive use of pre-trial detention when clear evidence of reasonable suspicion is missing.

The case of Imamoglu and of other dismissed mayors echo the case law of the Court on Demirtas and Kavala. As the judicial proceedings are ongoing, we can only hope for a swift reversal of the situation and quick steps to restore the conditions of healthy political pluralism in Türkiye to the benefit of all.