

**48th SESSION****Water resources under stress: towards better local and regional governance**

Recommendation 529 (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) (“the Charter”), especially its Articles 3, 4 and 9;
  - b. the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities and Authorities (ETS No. 106), along with its Additional Protocol (ETS No. 159); Protocol No. 2 (ETS No. 169) and Protocol No. 3 (CETS No. 206);
  - c. the Priorities of the Congress 2021-2026, specifically Priority d: Environmental issues and climate action in cities and regions;
  - d. Congress Resolution 500 (2024) “Local and regional responses to natural disasters and climate hazards: from risk preparedness to resilience”;
  - e. Congress Resolution 489 (2022) “A fundamental right to the environment: a matter for local and regional authorities - Towards a green reading of the European Charter of Local Self-Government”;
  - f. Congress Resolution 278 (2009) “Public water and sewer services for sustainable development”;
  - g. Congress Resolution 183 (2004) “The quality and quantity of drinking water”;
  - h. Congress Resolution 163 (2003) “The role of territorial authorities in the management of river basins”;
  - i. Recommendation Rec(2001)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the European Charter on Water Resources;
  - j. The European Green Deal, EU Water Framework Directive, Drinking Water Directive (revised), Groundwater Directive, Floods Directive and Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive;
  - k. United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/169 (2016) “The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation”;
  - l. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development of the United Nations, in particular SDG 1 “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”, SDG 3 “Good health and well-being”; SDG 6 “For clean water and sanitation for all”; SDG 11 “Sustainable cities and communities”; SDG 12 “Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns”, SDG 13: “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts” and SDG 14 “For life below water”.

<sup>1</sup> Debated and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2025 (see document CG(2025)48-14, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Heiða Björg HILMISDOTTIR, Iceland (L, SOC/G/PD) and Teuvo HATVA, Finland (R, ILDG).

## Recommendation 529 (2025)

### 2. The Congress points out that:

- a. fresh water is a vital resource for European societies, economies and the environment; sustainable use and conservation of freshwater resources - including lakes, rivers, groundwater and wetlands - are essential for sustainable development and are key to eradicating poverty and ensuring human development, health and wellbeing;
- b. access to drinking water and sanitation is recognised by the United Nations as a human right; however, many people still lack access to drinking water and sanitation, which exacerbates inequality and poses health and safety risks;
- c. Europe's water situation is increasingly precarious due to extreme weather conditions and climate-related disasters, as well as population growth, placing cities and regions at risk of water shortages, flooding and pollution;
- d. the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine has far-reaching environmental consequences for water resources and infrastructure, highlighting the need for resilient water systems and robust water infrastructure protection;
- e. sustainable water governance which addresses scarcity, abundance, and quality is crucial; it requires a strategic and inclusive watershed-based approach that uncouples economic growth from water consumption, and emphasises protection, reuse, and recycling of freshwater resources;
- f. effective water governance requires a strategic, multi-level and multidisciplinary approach with local and regional authorities, national authorities and stakeholders - including civil society, academia and the private sector - collaborating to manage water resources and preserve ecosystems and biodiversity;
- g. local and regional authorities are uniquely well-placed to develop water governance frameworks that meet their communities' specific needs.

### 3. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers to invite the respective national authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe to:

- a. adopt and implement effective and sustainable water governance policies, with permanent coordination, planning and cooperation among central, regional, and local authorities across sectors (such as agriculture, industry, and energy) and on the respect of principles and standards on human rights, democracy and social inclusion;
- b. prioritise water security in political agendas to support public health, economic stability and sustainable development while taking into account regional and cross-border resource management needs;
- c. promote river basin and aquifer management policies and foster collaboration between urban and rural areas, engaging a wide range of stakeholders - including businesses, civil society, and youth - to address water-related challenges;
- d. create an enabling environment through legislation, funding and research that empowers local and regional authorities to effectively implement water policies and drive innovation;
- e. implement educational initiatives to raise awareness of the water cycle and include water governance in national curricula, providing training for professionals and the general public on sustainable water governance;
- f. support universal access to water and sanitation, the protection of water resources and infrastructure and promote international cooperation and partnerships for sustainable and human rights-oriented water governance in Europe and beyond, advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

### 4. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to take account of this recommendation and its explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to Council of Europe member States in the field of management of water resources.